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Criticism of Family Life in Nineteenth Century English Fiction from Jane Austen to Samuel Butler

Theresa Mercedes Herbert
Loyola University Chicago

CRITICISM OF FAMILY LIFE IN NINETEENTH CENTURY ENGLISH FICTION FROM JANE AUSTEN TO SAMUEL BUTLER

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THERESA MERCEDES HERBERT

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PREFACE

A novelist, when writing of domestic life, is concerned with interfamily adjustments and accommodations, and with the problems of the family institution. The social and industrial changes of the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century led, by way of reaction to the sharper individualization and definition of all members of society, and consequently necessitated changes in the habits of family life. As fiction is inevitably a reflection of the thought and activities of the period in which it is written, we find in the domestic novel of this age the evidences of a changing family institution.

Few of the novels of this period are strictly domestic, but practically all include the family theme. The majority were written within that age of English history, the Victorian period, when society was making a determined effort to enforce the standards of decency and to protect the sacredness of home and family life. The novels here selected for study are those that stress some moral phase of domestic life and shall be analyzed in the order of their chronology.

The purpose of this paper is to show that in the family novel of the nineteenth century there is, first, a predominance of a moral point of view; second, a regard for domestic respectability and unity in spite of the trend toward individualism; third, an unquestioned loyalty toward the family as a social institution; and fourth, a reflection of the influences of the changing social attitudes.

CHAPTER I

EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY SOCIAL RESTRICTIONS AND TRADITIONS OF FAMILY LIFE

The closing years of the eighteenth century witnessed in fiction a movement toward the study of common life and character. Fielding and Smollett had earlier in the century broken the barriers of the conventional picture of life and had depicted it as it was. But the life they now saw and produced was that of the world with all its roughness and brutality,

> A masculinity pervaded, caused by the characters of the heroes of the novels, by the use of outdoor setting, rough farcical humor, crude realism and by the attitude of the writers toward women.[1]

During the century this type of fiction was imitated abundantly but nothing of importance was produced. It was not until after 1777 that English fiction again made a definite appearance of significance. This time the novel assumed the theme of domestic life characterized by a dominant moral tone. In that year, Fanny Burney published Evelina, a story of English domestic life, and later, from 1811 to 1818, appeared Jane Austen's novels of family life.

The fact that a change took place in the tone and subject matter of English fiction through the work of women writers is significant. The position of women was definitely one of repression. The marriage state was the only avenue through which a woman could express her own individuality,

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[1]Ernest W. Gray, "The Fielding-Smollett Tradition in the English Novel from 1750-1835", Harvard University, Summaries of Theses, 1931, p. 229.

and then, only in subservience to her husband. Any overt act of independence, particularly on the part of an unmarried woman, meant a loss of social caste. Women writers were held in especial oppobrium. In fact, so much in fear of social censorship were Fanny Burney and Jane Austen that the former wrote secretly and sent Evelina to the publisher in a disguised hand; while Jane Austen published her early works anonymously. Their very exclusion from active participation in the affairs of life, gave to these gifted, keen visioned women a perspective of life denied to other members of society. They were in a position to see and to evaluate social conventions. With time on their hands and influenced by that urge for expression and fulfilment that permeated this epoch, they wrote stories around their observations. As would be expected, the novel in the hands of women writers lost in a great degree the masculine tradition handed down from the early part of the eighteenth century. Marriage being the ambition of an eighteenth century woman's existence, fiction from then on kept before the reader "this question concerning the character of man, Does he promise well as a husband?"[2] The question appears facetious, but in view of the times it was quite important. And it was, for the women writers of the early century, the pivotal center around which they introduced their attack on the artificialities of society.

Chronology places Fanny Burney (1752-1840) in the eighteenth century; social attitudes placed her novels in the following century. Her stories are the immediate precursors of the novel of family life as established

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[2]Wilbur L. Cross, The Development of the English Novel, p. 95.

by Jane Austen. They hint of the theme of the breakdown in the sentimental attitude toward family life that is one of the outstanding characteristics of domestic fiction during the nineteenth century. A criticism of family life in nineteenth century fiction would be incomplete without a consideration of this writer's books. In passing, another woman writer should be mentioned with Fanny Burney, Mrs. Frances Brooke. A slight interest attaches to her novel, The Excursion, in that it preceded Evelina by a few months and appears to have been motivated by the same trend of thought. The heroine in Mrs. Brooke's story is described as

> a young lady of family but small fortune, with a mind sensible and improved, but totally ignorant of the world, who launches out from the country, steering without a pilot or compass, through the rocks and shelves of a London life;[3]

the title of Fanny Burney's novel reads, Evelina, Or A Young Lady's Entrance Into The World. The similarity of meaning implied in the description of Mrs. Brooke's heroine and the title of Miss Burney's book, appears to indicate the type of moral attitude that was about to enter the field of fiction.

Fanny Burney was not, however, primarily actuated by the spirit of social reform. Her purpose in Evelina was just to tell a good story about the things she knew. It includes, nevertheless, so many allusions to the higher ideals of family life as to indicate that the family institution was held, even at this period, in great esteen. For instance, the disquiet raised in the mind of Evelina's guardian when he fears for her moral integ-

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[3]Mrs. Frances Brooke, The Excursion, as quoted in Austin Dobson, Fanny Burney, p. 62.

rity on the occasion of Evelina being taken by her grandmother, "a woman by no means a proper companion or guardian for a young woman; ungentle in her temper, and unamiable in her manners."[4] In the agitation over the question of Evelina's birth is another example. Mr. Villars writes to Evelina that he will not suffer "her dear mother's ashes to be treated with ignominy" and that "her spotless character will be justified to the world."[5] In the final correspondence between Evelina and her guardian, he writes of the continuance of the family and the beauty of affection. He wishes that when Evelina's days are run that she will "be loved as kindly, watched as tenderly" as was he and continues, "And mayest thou, be sweetly, but not bitterly mourned, by some remaining darling of thy affections--some yet surviving Evelina."[6]

Cecilia (1782) Fanny Burney's second novel, reflects in a striking way the revolutionary attack on rank and a false code of honor, and the right of parents to control, or forbid, the marriages of their children. The story is built around a clause in Cecilia's uncle's will by which the future husband of Cecilia must take her name, or forfeit her fortune. The restraint put upon the voluntary choice of marriage results in a conflict between mother and son in which the son is menaced with "the censure of mankind, the renunciation of his family, and the curses of his father!"[7] all because

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[4]Fanny Burney, Evelina, p. 3.

[5]Ibid., p. 401.

[6]Ibid., p. 477.

[7]Fanny Burney, Cecilia, Vol. ii, p. 215.

of the mere change of name from Delvile to Beverly and the desire of the son to select his marriage mate. It is an interesting commentary of the time that Miss Burney received opposition to this scene. To her critic, Mr. Crisp, she defended it on the grounds that "it was the point in her book to which all previous lines tended; if it must be expunged, she would rather there be no book at all."[8] There is apparent in the debate an over straining for effect, due, no doubt, to the anxiety of the writer to make evident her sympathy with the new social outlook. There is no over emphasis, however, in her character sketches. The great merit of her book lies in the author's skill in the manipulation of Richardson's epistolary method in bringing out the various individualities of her characters. Her experience in meeting people was considerable. She spent her youth in a gay and varied world, and met all sorts of people from the top of society to the bottom. Her books are evidences of her discerning eye in catching the subtle traits that differentiate one individual from another.

To Fanny Burney, Harold Child gives the credit for creating the novel of home life, and from the vogue of Evelina, Cecilia, and a later book, Camilia (1796), believes that Jane Austen may have learned how much could be achieved in this field. While Jane Austen (1775-1817) was in direct succession to Fanny Burney in taking up the novel of domestic manners, it was to her technical skill and seriousness of purpose that this type of story was placed as a definite genre in the classification of fiction. Jane

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[8]Annie Paine Ellis, "Preface", Cecilia, viii.

[9]Harold Child, Cambridge, History of English Literature, Vol. XII, p.257.

Austen's novels are of country life and simple everyday scenes. As the daughter of a country clergyman her acquaintance was limited to villagers, clergymen, and country gentlefolk. She was the first to draw exactly the lives of these people. Her stories are of infinite interest despite their utter lack of adventure, grotesque types, and unusual incident. The secret of her popularity even today, lies in what Pelham Edgar so cogently defines as her meaning of fiction: "Fiction meant for her the representation of a small group of individuals linked by a compelling interest which all feel for whatever concerns the others."[10] Her observation of the foibles of her fellow-creatures was unusually sharp. She seized on qualities which are frequently found in human nature and developed them with such fidelity that they became living persons for all time. In all her books marriage is the ultimate goal,

> the meeting, the obstacle, the gradual surmounting of these, and the happy ending occurs with the regularity of clockwork, and yet each one differs from all the others, and she is never monotonous.[11]

In a sense, marriage was a logical topic. Since the interest of the people was being centered more and more on the individual, and since convention continued the ruling force in the great majority of lives, the conflict of these two opposing forces was perhaps more noticeable within the marriage institution than elsewhere. The greatest opposition grew out of the continuance of the old feudal law of entail. The eldest sons, through

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[10]Palham Edgar, The Art of the Novel from 1700 to the Present Time, p. 95.

[11]G. E. Milton, Jane Austen and Her Times, p. 89.

its operation, were taken care of in spite of themselves, while custom provided for the younger sons in the granting of curacies. Outside the family circle, daughters had not much to look for; marriage was practically their only outlet. It was natural then, that this topic should be all absorbing, and should be of especial interest to the young women who were fictionizing their own social impressions. Jane Austen's novels were no exception, but they differed in the standards she set up. Subtly interposed within the commonplace plot, was seen her theme of a far higher ideal of marriage. Marriage in her day was less often a union of mutual respect and love than it was an arrangement to coalesce position and fortune, or to provide a living for dependent daughters. The marriage of convenience was even more evident then than it was later in the century when the novelists attacked it so strongly.

Jane Austen wanted all her heroines to have every probability of happiness in the marriage state. In an analysis of her heroines' marriages, certain fundamental attributes for marital happiness are conspicuous. For instance, in Sense and Sensibility (1811), she joined together two characters of opposite dispositions, but not before the author had made clear that that union was conducive to happiness. The foolish romanticism of Marianne Dashwood found a perfect response in the errant Willoughby, but the ardour of both would soon have passed, leaving nothing enduring in its place. Jane Austen's ideal of the suitable marriage for a person of Marianne's temperament was a union with one possessing a calm, understanding, generous nature; thus Marianne mates with Colonel Brandon. Never in any case in her novels, is the attractiveness of personal appearance the final basis of

attachment. Thorough understanding of character she believed was the final deciding factor. By constant association her men and women knew each other perfectly and it was only after this knowledge was acquired that marriage was possible. Darcy and Elizabeth in Pride and Prejudice (1813) are attracted in the beginning by the fine appearance of each other, but they begin to care for one another only when each has penetrated the shell of pride and prejudice that hides the true nature of the lovers. Above all the other requirements of the ideal marriage, Jane Austen placed mutual love. Mr. Knightly in Emma (1815) has long loved Emma. It was only after the gradual evolution of Emma's better self, and after the consciousness of Mr. Knightly's quiet strength of character had changed her admiration to love, that the marriage was accomplished. It would seem, then, that Jane Austen's faith in the perfect marriage union rested upon three essential factors: suitability of character, thorough understanding of character and mutual love.

Perhaps her most serious condemnation of marriage based on convenience rather than love, is subtly voiced in the interview between Elinor Dashwood and her brother. Colonel Brandon had shown some slight attention to Elinor and brother and sister discussed the desirability of a union with the Colonel. The brother began:

> "Who is Colonel Brandon? Is he a man of fortune?"
>
> "Yes; he has a very good property in Dorsetshire."
>
> "I am glad of it. He seems a most gentlemanlike man, and I think, Elinor, I may congratulate you on the prospect of a very respectable establishment in life."
>
> "Me, brother—what do you mean?"

"He likes you. I observed him narrowly, and am convinced of it. What is the amount of his fortune?"

"I believe about two thousand a year."

"Two thousand a year;" and then working himself up to a pitch of enthusiastic generosity, he added: "Elinor, I wish with all my heart it were twice as much for your sake."

"Indeed I believe you, replied Elinor, "but I am very sure that Colonel Brandon has not the smallest wish of marrying me."

"You are mistaken, Elinor; you are very much mistaken. A very little trouble on your side secures him. Perhaps just at present he may be undecided; the smallness of your fortune may make him hang back; his friends may all advise him against it. But some of those little attentions and encouragements which ladies can so easily give, will fix him, in spite of himself. And there can be no reason why you should not try for him. It is not to be supposed that any prior attachment on your side--in short, you know as to an attachment of that kind, it is quite out of the question, the objections are insurmountable, you have too much sense not to see that. Colonel Brandon must be the man; and no civility shall be wanting, on my part, to make him pleased with you and your family. It is a match that must give universal satisfaction. In short, it is a kind of thing that"--and lowering his voice to an important whisper--"will be exceedingly welcome to all parties." Recollecting himself, however, he added, "That is, I mean to say--your friends are all truly anxious to see you well settled."[12]

The utter lack of reticence with which the situation is discussed must inevitably jar on the sensitiveness of any serious minded reader. It must be kept in mind that marriage in that day was not much more than a well directed barter. Usually it was the mother who schemed for the marriage. On these mothers of marriageable duaghters, Jane Austen was always rather merciless. She pictured them as foolish and mercenary, with no thought of their daughters' happiness beyond that which would be incident to an improvement in their social position; or, at least, that which would be felt in

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[12]Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility, p. 179.

maintaining it. When the prospect for either condition seemed slight, then a marriage of any sort was accepted as better than none. Mrs. Bennet in Pride and Prejudice is Jane Austen's most flagrant example of this type of mother.

In the opening lines of Pride and Prejudice is found an overt declaration of the aim of families with marriageable daughters: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."[13] The ruthlessness of this declaratory utterance prepares us for Mrs. Bennet. Her mad desire to marry her daughters deprived her of all sensitivity to their feelings. The counteracting influence of amiable Mr. Bennet safeguarded the good feeling within his family circle. On one occasion Mrs. Bennet bursts in on him exclaiming,

> "Oh! Mr. Bennet, you are wanted immediately; we are all in a uproar. You must come and make Lizzie marry Mr. Collins, for she vows she will not have him, and if you do not make haste he will change his mind and not have her."[14]

And when she added that if Elizabeth would not accept Mr. Collins, Elizabeth would never see her again, Mr. Bennet calmly said to his daughter:

> "An unhappy alternative is before you, Elizabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents. Your mother will never see you again if you do not marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you do."

The author concludes the episode with a remark that is interpretative of her recognition of the salutary influence of a sense of humor on conflicting

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[13] Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice, p. 4.

[14] Ibid., p. 95.

personalities within the family group, "Elizabeth could not but smile at such a conclusion of such a beginning."[15] Mrs. Bennet's reception of the news of Elizabeth's engagement to Mr. Darcy illustrates the lightness with which these mothers held matrimony:

> "Good gracious! Lord bless me! only think! Mr. Darcy! Who would have thought it?.....Oh, my sweetest Lizzie, how rich and how great you will be! What pin-money, what jewels, what carriages you will have!"[16]

and so, on and on, with not a word of loving understanding. Mr. Bennet on the other hand was solicitous of his daughter's happiness, irrespective of any worldly advantages. He did not understand that her dislike for Mr. Darcy had changed, and he was worried as to the ultimate outcome of a marriage not founded on love and esteem. Mr. Bennet says,

> "But let me advise you to think better of it. I know your disposition, Lizzie. I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable unless you truly esteemed your husband--unless you looked up to him as a superior. Your lively talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal marriage. You could scarcely escape discredit and misery. My child, let me not have the grief of seeing you unable to respect your partner in life. You know not what you are about."[17]

Jane Austen thus balances the effect of the good and the bad in parental influences and leaves the reader with the satisfactory feeling that all will be well with a family presided over by a father such as Mr. Bennet.

While marriage is of paramount interest to Jane Austen, other aspects of family life aroused her attention. The religious practice of family prayers is mentioned; a subject which is constantly reappearing in nineteenth century fiction. In Jane Austen's novels its use is negligible.

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[16] Ibid., p. 327.

[17] Ibid., p. 326.

It reappears in all its beauty and sincerity in Mrs. Gaskell's Ruth (1853). In its final mention in the last novel of this study, Butler's The Way of All Flesh (1903), it is condemned as a hypocritical farce. For the most part, family prayers is introduced into the fiction of the century for the purpose of satirizing its usage. Jane Austen's attitude toward this family practice is one of regret that it is no longer a part of domestic life. She has Fanny Price speak of it as "a valuable part of former times"[18] that should have been retained. In the same story the author takes up another subject pertaining to religion in her defence of a clergyman's calling. Heretofore, the curacy was held in disrepute, being for the greater part filled by the younger sons of the gentry who automatically assumed the position that tradition had provided for them. They were a pleasure loving group given to no serious consideration of the religious duties of their position. Jane Austen scorned the hypocrisy that custom had engendered in this calling, and regretted the attitude of society toward holy orders. By means of a scene wherein she presents the strongly contrasting opinions of two of her characters, Jane Austen is able to give both sides of the situation without risking the art of her narrative. In Edmund Bertram's argument with Miss Crawford on his entering the ministry, the high religious ideals of practice and example of the former are thrown into sharp relief against the hard worldliness of Miss Crawford.[19] The

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[18] Jane Austen, Mansfield Park, p. 72.

[19] Ibid., p. 77.

argument is pointed toward Jane Austen's opinion by the presence of a third party in the person of Fanny Price whose favorable religious ideals had been sounded previously.

The argument brought out the indication of another change that was taking place within the family insitution. Miss Crawford's scornful remark about Edmund Bertram accepting a curacy,

> "Oh no doubt he is very sincere in preferring an income ready made to the trouble of working for one, and has the best intentions of doing nothing all the rest of his days but eat, drink, and grow fat"[20]

is illustrative of a new attitude toward the custom of determining a son's position for him. Mansfield Park shows evidence that the daughters as well as the sons were asserting an independence of thought. The author focuses attention on the fact in the conference between Sir Thomas Bertram and his niece on the subject of her refusal to marry a handsome, eligible young man merely because she could neither respect nor love him. To the uncle this was both incredible and wicked, and Sir Thomas speaks of his disappointment in her character:

> "I had thought that you were peculiarly free from wilfullness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which, in young women, is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence."[21]

These words of Sir Bertram's are a wonderful commentary on the opinion of the time. The striking thing about this change is that it was coming about through the fact that the younger generation was demanding a higher moral

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[20] Ibid., p. 92.

[21] Ibid., p. 263.

tone.

Two of the arresting aspects of Jane Austen's stories are the lack of deep family affection among brothers and sisters and an aloofness of bearing between parents and children. The concern shown in each other's affairs seems for the most part superficial; self-centered interest of the individual is more pronounced. Family life was set too thoroughly in conventional grooves to develop deep family affections. Although Jane Austen drew most of her characters in this fashion, she has given us several examples of deep inter-family feeling. Mrs. Dashwood of Sense and Sensibility is perhaps her most affectionate mother. Jane Austen ridicules her pride in her daughter when she says, "that Elinor's merit should not be acknowledged by everyone who knew her, was to her comprehension impossible."[22] Mrs. Dashwood was not mercenary as most of Miss Austen's mothers are,

> It was contrary to every doctrine of hers, that difference of fortune should keep any couple asunder who were attracted by resemblance of disposition.[23]

Mr. Benson of Pride and Prejudice is her kindliest father, and her outstanding portrayal of brotherly and sisterly affection is that displayed by Fanny and William of Mansfield Park on their reunion after a separation of seven years. The scene is deeply significant of Jane Austen's realization of the unity and integrity of family life:

> Fanny had never known so much felicity in her life as in this unchecked, equal, fearless intercourse with her brother and friend, who

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[22] Jane Austen, op. cit., p. 11

[23] Ibid., p. 11.

> was opening all his heart to her, telling her all his hopes and fears, plans, and solicitudes.....father and mother news, home at Mansfield.....earlyyears.....every former united pain and pleasure retraced with the fondest recollection. An advantage this, a strengthener of love, in which even the conjugal tie is beneath the fraternal. Children of the same family, the same blood, with the same first associations and habits, have some means of enjoyment in their power which no subsequent connection can supply; and it must be by a long and unnatural estrangement, by a divorce which no subsequent connection can justify, if such precious remains of the earliest attachments are ever entirely outlived.[24]

On the subject of children, the novels reveal what might be a lack of understanding; or, a greater interest in the satirizing of the weakness of doting parents. This coldness of Jane Austen's might be due, one of her biographers, G. E. Milton, believes,[25] to the fact that she and her brothers and sisters were brought up more repressively than other children. The period of Jane's childhood witnessed a reaction to the rigid severity toward children of the old days. A period of undue indulgence had set in, but which little affected the Austen children. The attitude she takes toward children in her books is almost always that of their being tiresome. There never seems to be any genuine love for them or pleasure in their society. This is very evident in her attitude toward the children of Lady Middleton in Sense and Sensibility where she describes them as particularly badly behaved and odious and comments ironically on "fond mothers".

> Fortunately for those who pay their court through such foibles, a fond mother, though in pursuit of praise for her children, the most rapacious of human beings, is likewise the most credulous; her demands are

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[24]Jane Austen, op. cit., p. 194.

[25]G. E. Milton, Jane Austen and Her Times, p. 22.

exorbitant; but she will swallow anything.[26]

And in answer to Lucy Steele's comment on "children full of life and spirit", Elinor Dashwood answers, "I confess that while I am at Barton Park, I never think of tame and quiet children with any abhomence."[27] The close domesticity of women of Jane Austen's time is reflected in all of her books by the lack of conversational material her feminine characters display, except that about the merest trivialities. In Sense and Sensibility it is remarked of a dinner given by John Dashwood "no poverty of any kind, except of conversation, appeared--but there the deficiency was considerable." The story then relates that when the ladies withdrew to the drawing room "this poverty was particularly evident, for the gentlemen had supplied the discourse with some variety." Now the only subject on which the ladies were able to converse was the comparative heights of the two children, Harry and William Middleton. The author adds,

> Had both children been there, the affair might have been determined too easily by measuring them at once; but, as Harry was only present, it was all conjectural assertion on both sides, and everybody had a right to be equally positive in their opinion, and to repeat it over and over again as often as they liked.[28]

Precedence and etiquette in the first half of the nineteenth century were supremely important matters in provincial society. The petty snobbery within classes is an obvious fact in Jane Austen's novels of manners. All

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[26]Jane Austen, op. cit., p. 97.

[27]Ibid., p. 99.

[28]Ibid., p. 188.

of the characters are supposed to be gentlefolk but there is a difference between those who are of better family than others. Bingley's condescension in marrying Jane Bennet and Sir Thomas Bertram's perturbation over the delicacy of putting his niece in her proper place, are examples. Sir Thomas observes to Mrs. Norris:

> "There will be some difficulty in our way, Mrs. Norris, as to the distinction proper to be made between the girls as they grow up; how to preserve in the minds of my daughters the consciousness of what they are without making them think too lowly of their cousin; and how, without depressing her spirits too far, to make her remember that she is not a Miss Bertram."[29]

During the course of the story we are able to trace the gradual disappearance of Sir Thomas' snobbishness. He is one character that Jane Austen permits to develop before the eyes of her readers. The cold selfishness of his children and their friends teach him the true values of life. The story closes with his consent to his son Edmund's marriage with the niece he had thought not on a social plane with his daughters. Of his consent, the story says,

> Sir Thomas, sick of ambitious and mercenary connections, prizing more and more the sterling good of principle and temper, and chiefly anxious to bind by the strongest securities all that remained to him of domestic felicity.....joyfully consents to Edmund's application.[30]

Thus Jane Austen brings to an end her story of life based on an artificial standard of living with words that argue well for her belief in a high type of family life.

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[29] Jane Austen, op. cit., p. 7.

[30] Ibid., p. 394.

Jane Austen's contracted view of life has left us with a picture of the utilitarian aims of a circle of highly respectable English country folk during the closing years of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth. She allows it to be seen that she is not in complete accord with conventions but accepts conditions without the slightest hint of revolt. What she does toward change is done unobtrusively. Her moral never interferes with her story. We have seen that the question of marriage with its accompanying involvements of parental interference and antagonisms interested Jane Austen as well as Fanny Burney more than other phases of family life. Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849), another early nineteenth century author writing in the domestic theme, was more concerned in the disintegration of family life through the pursuit of false social standards. She is a minor writer, but important in that she was the first to devote a book solely to this theme. Her own experiences peculiarly equipped her to write on this subject. She had passed her girlhood in England, and later went to live on her father's estate in Ireland. The Edgeworths, however, spent much of their time in fashionable London where Miss Edgeworth found material for novels of manners which she called Tales of Fashionable Life (1809-12). These novels are an exposure of the extravagance, nonsense, and frivolity of fashionable London society. They are, however, "vitiated by an over didacticism; by a strenous insistence upon the obvious moral".[31] As a result her stories, Helen, Belinda, and Ormond, are rapidly becoming obsolete pictures of a

[31] Brander Matthews, "Introduction", The Absentee, p. xii.

vanishing social era. In her two masterpieces, Castle Rackrant (1800), and The Absentee (1812), Miss Edgeworth was content to let character speak for itself, and to relinquish to the story the duty of pointing its moral.

The Absentee is the story of Irish gentry trying to distinguish themselves in London society. The real interest of the book is in the satire of the Clonbrony family, who waste their money and meet contempt in trying to climb the social ladder while their peasantry are starving in Ireland. The actors in this social drama are saved from their own perverted social aspirations by the serious young heir of the family, Lord Colambre. On his first entry into society after his return from Cambridge, he overhears some pseudo friends of his mother's ridiculing her. Of his reactions to the conversation Miss Edgeworth writes

> His vexation was increased by his consciousness that there was some mixture of truth in their sarcasms.....He loved his mother; and whilst he endeavored to conceal her faults and foibles as much as possible from his own heart, he could not endure those who dragged them to light and ridicule.[32]

As time passed he determined that he would not remain "an absentee" from his home and estates in Ireland. His resolution was strengthened when he witnessed the distress of his friend's family, the Berryles, who, on the death of the father, were plunged into poverty. The Berryl daughters had lived in the highest style and were now left totally unprovided for. Mrs. Berryl had mortgaged her jointure. In this case, too, Miss Edgeworth has the burden of the family extravagance fall on the shoulders of the oldest son.

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[32]Marie Edgeworth, The Absentee, p. 86.

of the junior Berryl's situation she writes:

> Mr. Berryl had an estate now left to him, but without income. He could not be so dishonest as to refuse to pay his father's just debts; he could not let his mother and sisters starve.

The similarity between the circumstances of his friend's family and of his own, struck Lord Colambre forcibly. All this evil had arisen from Lady Berryl's passion for living at fashionable places. Lady Berryl "made her husband an Absentee--an absentee from his home, his affairs, his duties, and his estate"[33] just as his mother imposed her will on his father. The negligence, the extravagance were the same; the consequences would inevitably be the same. In having the Berryl family the real victims of the disastrous life of the social climber rather than the hero and his family, Maria Edgeworth has done what practically every writer in this period of fiction did. There seems to have been an unwritten law that the heroes and heroines of nineteenth century fiction must not be visited with the keenest suffering. These authors are realists but their realism is mixed with a respectful regard for the sentimentalisms of their readers; and one might add, with a slight touch of their own. They trust to the analogy of situations to warn their heroes and heroines of impending disaster and thus provide them with a motive for reform. It would not be the modern way. Lord Colambre's visit to Ireland again brought him in contact with the aspirants for social recognition. The comedy of errors put on by Mrs. Raffarty caused him to smile as well as to sigh, for as the author writes,

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[33] Ibid., p. 135.

> similar foibles and follies in persons of different rank, fortune, and manner, appear to common observers so unlike that they laugh without scruples of conscience in one case, at what in another ought to touch themselves most nearly.[34]

Lord Colambre sighed because he knew it was the same desire to appear what they were not, the same vain ambition to vie with superior rank and fortune, or fashion which actuated Lady Clonbrony, his mother, and Mrs. Raffarty, and that his mother was as much the object of ridicule to those of higher rank as was Mrs. Raffarty. The seriousness with which Miss Edgeworth endowed Lord Colambre permits her to inoffensively moralize a bit further. As, for instance, Lord Colambre's meditation on extravagance,

> He sighed still more deeply, when he considered that, in whatever station or with whatever fortune, extravagance, that is, the living beyond our income, must lead to distress and meanness, and end in shame and ruin.[35]

The moral aspect of Miss Edgeworth's thesis is made more effective by the author's rescue of her characters before complete deterioration overtook them. This the author accomplishes by having the hero's successful plea for his parents' return to their old home made in the name of his father's and mother's former characters--the well-beloved, beneficent, respected gentry. The occasion of Lord Colambre's appeal was when the son told his mother that her extravagances had about wrecked their Irish properties and had thrown their peasantry into great poverty. Lady Clonbrony answered, wife-wise, that she hadn't been more extravagant than her husband, and what

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[34] Ibid., p. 172.

[35] Ibid., p. 172.

she had spent, was expended in the best company, "while Lord Clonbrony had squandered his money among a set of low people, in his muddling, discreditable way".[36] To which her son replied that his father had been a man respectable and respected by gentlemen who were his equals but

> "when he had been forced away from his home, deprived of his objects and occupation, compelled to live.....where he could find no employments that were suitable to him--set down, late in life, in the midst of strangers, to him cold and reserved--himself too proud to bend to those who had disdained him as an Irishman--is he not more to be pitied than blamed.....for the degradation which has ensued?"[37]

That for which Lord Colambre begs to be restored to his father are the elements of Miss Edgeworth's ideal of well-rounded life:

> "Restore my father to himself!....Give his feelings again to expand in benevolent, in kind, useful action; give him again to his tenantry, his duties, his country: his home."

To his mother, the plea is similar in import:

> ".....return to that home yourself dear mother! leave all the nonsense of high life--scorn the impertinence of these dictators of fashion, who, in return for all the pains we take to imitate, to court them--in return for the sacrifice of health, fortune, peace of mind--bestow sarcasm, contempt, ridicule, and mimicry!.....Return to an unsophisticated people--to poor, but grateful hearts, still warm with the remembrance of your kindness, still blessing you for favors long since conferred, ever praying to see you once more."[38]

Lady Clonbrony was won by her son's appeal to the memory of her poor, although for an astonished instant Miss Edgeworth leaves her readers gasping, for to this impassioned plea, Lady Clonbrony made this stupefying comment:

> "If anybody could conceive how I detest the sight, the thoughts of that old yellow damask furniture, in the drawing room at Clonbrony Castle--"[39]

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[36] Ibid., p. 280.

[37] Ibid., p. 281.

[38] Ibid., p. 281.

[39] Ibid., p. 282.

Marriage, although a question of secondary importance in The Absentee, is given careful attention. Miss Edgeworth's ideal of it was, as Jane Austen's, a high one. Through the character, Miss Broadhurst, a young woman of large income, Miss Edgeworth expresses her disdain of those whose only thought in marriage is a monetary one. Miss Broadhurst minces no words in expressing herself on the subject of pursuit by false lovers. To Lady Anne's envious desire for a fortune such as hers so she could be able to command as many admirers, Miss Broadhurst replied:

> "I only wish that I could lay aside my fortune sometimes....and see how few people would know me then....Hearts, you know, Lady Anne, are to be won only with radiant eyes. Bought hearts your ladyship certainly would not recommend. They're such poor things--no wear at all. Turn then which way you will, you can make nothing of them."

Miss Broadhurst had become skeptical of the intentions of all men for she had all but been taken in on several occasions. She explains,

> "They are brought to me by dozens; and they are so made up for sale, and the people do so swear to you that it's real, real love, and it looks so like it; and, if you stop to examine it, you hear it pressed upon you by such elegant oaths.....By all that's lovely!--By all my hopes of happiness!.....Why, what can one do but look like a fool and believe; for these men, at the time, all look so like gentlemen, that one cannot bring oneself flatly to tell them that they are cheats and swindlers, that they are perjuring their precious souls."[40]

Another moral aspect of marriage which interested Miss Edgeworth was the injustice of the attitude that makes a woman only/an undesirable mate if her family has incurred some social stigma. Grace Nugent, the heroine of The Absentee, is the victim of clouded identity and therefore suffers under the dictates of the double moral code for men and women. Lord Colambre

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[40] Ibid., pp. 112, 113.

hears of Grace's connection with a family "where all the men were not sans peur, and none of the women sans reproche."[41] He is overcome. His love for Grace was deep but not strong enough to withstand the criticism of society. Of his reactions, the novel says,

> Lord Colambre had the greatest dread of marrying any woman whose mother had conducted herself ill. His reason, his prejudices, his pride, his delicacy, and even his limited experience, were all against it. All his hopes, his plans of future happiness, were shaken to their very foundations, he felt as if he had received a blow that stunned his mind, and from which he could not recover his faculties.[42]

Sentiments such as these reflect a high sense of morality, but, to Miss Edgeworth they seemed unnecessarily cruel! Later, in a conversation with Count O'Halloran, Lord Colambre again repeats the same sentiment. The approaching marriage of their mutual friend, Sir James Brooke, was under discussion. Lord Colambre exclaims:

> "Happy man! going to be married to such a woman, daughter of such a mother"

to which the Count replied

> "Daughter of such a mother! That is indeed a great addition and a great security to his happiness....Such a family to marry into; good from generation to generation; illustrious by character as well as by geneology; all the sons brave, and all the daughters chaste."

The Count then continues

> "In marrying, a man does not, to be sure, marry his wife's mother; and yet a prudent man, when he begins to think of the daughter, would look sharp at the mother; ay, and back to the grandmother too, and along the whole female line of ancestry."[43]

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[41] Ibid., p. 191.

[42] Ibid., p. 193.

[43] Ibid., p. 302.

Here is a situation that is extremely interesting in the divergence of viewpoint it represents between the first part of the nineteenth century and the latter part. Maria Edgeworth was prompted by the moral aspects of the case in this allusion of the count's to a woman's ancestry. The science of hereditary influence was probably something unknown to her.[44] In Meredith and Butler, a similar reference would be interpreted as an extenuating circumstance of scientific origin.

Miss Nugent's resentment of the opprobrium that was cast upon her over the uncertainty of her birth, was not very strong. With the exception of one indignant exclamation, "Then, if I had been the daughter of a mother who had conducted herself ill, he would never have trusted me!"[45] she accepted the situation philosophically. The time was not yet ripe for a very firm expression on this question apparently. The solicitude of these people for the integrity of their home took a more justifiable stand when dealing with such characters as Miss Edgeworth calls "sirens".

> "For the foibles of the sex, I hope, I have as much indulgence as any man, and for the errors of passion as much pity,"

says Sir James Brooks when speaking of Lady Isabel,

> "but I cannot express the indignation, the abhorrence I feel against women cold and vain, who use their wit and their charm only to make others miserable.....I express antipathy to those who return the hospitality they received from a warm-hearted people, by publicly setting the example of elegant sentimental hypocrisy, or daring disregard of decorum, by privately endeavoring to destroy the domestic peace of families, on which, at last, public as well as private virtue and happiness depend."[46]

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[44] Darwin's Origin of Species was published six years after Miss Edgeworth's death and nearly fifty years after the publication of The Absentee.

[45] Maria Edgeworth, op. cit., p. 337.

[46] Ibid., p. 328.

The selection of just the moral attitudes toward family life that a story reveals, gives the impression of a rather unbending rigorous tale. The Absentee is far from this. It has plenty of action and vigor and movement, that carries the reader completely away. Even where Miss Edgeworth is most serious there is an alertness of dialogue and a brevity of scene. She is sympathetic with all of her characters, the peasants as well as the gentry and portrays them with fidelity. Where she is dealing with the Irish tenantry her racy humor finds full play and makes this portion of The Absentee the most interesting.

The domestic novel as produced by Fanny Burney, Jane Austen, and Maria Edgeworth was one of serious import as well as of good fictional material. It wasn't confined to just one phase of the domestic scene as we have noted, although marriage was the most prominent topic. But whatever the subject, the tone was emphatic in the attempt to raise and preserve the moral integrity of family life. While the interest of these authors was obviously domestic, they were not consciously writing what they themselves would designate a family novel. Several years later, however, Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873) published a story to which he wrote a prefatory note claiming his novel to be such. In his note to The Caxtons (1849) the author writes that this is the first of his books in which

> man has been viewed less in his active relations with the world, than in his repose at his own hearth:—in a word, the greater part of the canvass has been devoted to the completion of a simple Family Picture.

He adds further

> In the Hero whose autobiography connects the different characters and events of the work, it has been the Author's intention to imply the

influences of Home upon conduct and career of youth.[47]

The Caxtons are Austin Caxton, a scholar engaged on a great work, "The History of Human Error", his wife Kitty, much his junior, his brother, Roland, the Captain, who served in the Napoleonic campaign, the two children of the latter, Herbert and Blanche, and Austin's son, Pisistratus, who tells the story. The education of the hero, Pisistratus, is the first theme developed by the author. The Caxtons is the only book so far in this study that has given special attention to parental interest in education. The training of Pisistratus began, as the preface inferred, within the home. Austin Caxton's answer to the query of a friend, "Of course, sir, you will begin soon to educate your son yourself?" is indicative of Bulwer-Lytton's thesis:

> "A scholar, sir--at least one like me--is of all persons the most unfit to teach young children. A mother, sir--a simple, natural, loving mother--is the enfant's true guide to knowledge.....he is at school already with the two great teachers, Nature and Love.....Let us leave Nature alone for the present, and Nature's loving proxy, the watchful mother."[48]

Home influences, particularly a mother's is a recurring subject with the author. His biographer, Earl Lytton, quotes from a speech of the elder Bulwer-Lytton made at Leeds in 1854 on the subject of education, in which the same belief is expressed. In it the listeners are reminded that education is by no means confined to school alone:

> I think you will see that a good education includes the school--but it requires something more; and here don't let me forget, amongst our other advantages, the habits of our domestic life....There are few of us who

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[47] Bulwer-Lytton, The Caxtons, p. 5.

[48] Ibid., pp. 19, 20.

> have succeeded honourably in the world that will not acknowledge that we owe far less to the school than to the precepts and example that we found at home, and especially to the precepts of a mother's lips and the stainless example of a mother's life.[49]

There is nothing unusual in the method of education to which Bulwer-Lytton subjects the hero. Later in the century George Meredith experimented with an educative innovation in The Ordeal of Richard Feveral which he attempted to prove was prohibitive to natural development. Bulwer-Lytton's intentions on the contrary appear to be to demonstrate the beneficial effects of the ordinary progression of educative procedure, under the proper teachers at the proper time. For example, when Pisistratus had reached a point where his mental development was overlapping his physical growth, he was sent to school "to be taught by little schoolboys to be a boy again."[50] As his father explained, "there was no want of fruitfulness" in his son, but it was better "to put back the hour of produce, that the plant may last."[51] From then on his formal education took place in the school; preparatory school was followed by the academy, and this in turn by the university. There is but one break in the process, this occurring between the academy and the university. Pisistratus became secretary to Mr. Trevanion, a parliamentarian. His father allowed him to enter, pre-maturely, into the world of men, not in anticipation of the career of public life Pisistratus intended following,

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[49] Victor A. Lytton, The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton, p. 201.

[50] Bulwer-Lytton, op. cit., p. 28.

[51] Ibid., p. 29.

but more as a settling process before continuing his studies. For, as Pisistratus said of his own character, "I was naturally so joyous, that I should have made college life a holiday."[52] Later, when Pisistratus entered Cambridge, he remarked,

> It was fortunate, in one respect, for me that I had seen a little of the real world—the metropolitan, before I came to that mimic one—the cloistral. For what were called pleasures in the last, and which might have allured me, had I come fresh from school, had no charm for me now. .....I had already outlived such temptations and so, naturally, I was thrown out of the society of the idle, and somewhat into that of the laborious.[53]

As is apparent, the author was working with perfect material.

The university training of Pisistratus, however, was terminated voluntarily before completion, in order to take up the burden of retrieving the family fortune. The parents reluctantly acquiesced for university distinction was then "among the popular passports to public life." Bulwer-Lytton had great respect for intellectual achievement placing, as he did in the sketch of the Trevanion family, "the aristocracy of the intellect above the aristocracy of rank."[54] Beneath Bulwer-Lytton's respect of knowledge was a very practical viewpoint of the fact, as he expresses it in the words of the scholarly father, that, "it is no use in the world to know all the languages expounded in lexicons, if we don't learn the language of the world."[55] He condones the pure scholarly type of citizen. Their mode of life develops too sensitive a spirit. In Pisistratus' bringing up, the writer symbolizes his ideal toward

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[52] Ibid., p. 171.

[53] Ibid., p. 311.

[54] Ibid., p. 204.

[55] Ibid., p. 211.

which youth be trained--the active man combined with the scholarly. On this point, Austin Caxton says to his son,

> "Had I lived more with men, and less with dreams and books, I should have made my nature large enough to bear the loss of a single passion. But in solitude we shrink up. No plant so much as man needs the sun and the air.....I comprehend now why most of our best and wisest men have lived in capitals and therefore again I say, that one scholar in a family is enough. Confiding in your sound heart and strong honor, I turn you thus betimes on the world."[56]

The author does not neglect to commend the father's part in the education of his son. The wisdom of the father's guidance is shown in Pisistratus' reaction to an occurrence similar in character to that which had had such a deadening effect on the senior Caxton's ambitions. Pisistratus falls in love with Fanny Trevanion, a girl above him in rank and wealth. On her father's refusal of her hand to Pisistratus the latter acted with such wisdom and gentlemanliness that Mr. Trevanion exclaimed,

> "In a position that might have moved anger, scorn, pity, you have made a barren-hearted man honour and admire you. You, a boy, have made me, with my grey hairs, think better of the whole world; tell you father that!"[57]

In these words, Bulwer-Lytton acknowledges his great faith in the habits acquired of gentle birth, in "that silent education which English gentlemen commonly receive from their very cradle";[58] in the belief that "the instincts of a man's heart, and a gentleman's honour"[59] are far wiser than age and

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[56] Ibid., p. 219.

[57] Ibid., p. 265.

[58] Ibid., p. 283.

[59] Ibid., p. 288.

experience. "There is certainly something," the author writes, "of exquisite kindness and thoughtful benevolence--in that rarest of gifts--fine breeding!"[60] The wisdom of the father's training is further illustrated when Pisistratus, as a young man claimed a part in the mutual support and assistance of the family group. Pisistratus as a child is shown living as all children do on an equality of affection where difference of age and intellect are merged. His growth from this stage is measured by his first realization of a new status of obligation that came to him on his return from school "for good". He felt

> at last he was a man privileged to aid or solace those dear ones who had ministered, as yet without return.

He says

> ".....to come home for good is to share the everyday life of cares and duties--it is to enter into the confidence of home."[61]

But his final growth is reached when with the undaunted courage and confidence of young manhood he assumed the family's financial burdens. This brave young crusader only faltered when he was about to leave home for Australia, the seat of his conquest:

> "Hard it is to get on in the world--very hard!"

he exclaimed,

> "But the most painful step in the way is that which starts from the threshold of a beloved home."[62]

In contrast to the perfect training Pisistratus received, the story includes an example of an education that was wrong from the very beginning.

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[60] Ibid., p. 336.

[61] Ibid., p. 65.

[62] Ibid., p. 384.

It was that of the cousin, Vivian Caxton. Vivian was the victim of an unhappy home. Disparagement of age and difference of racial instincts had separated his parents, and had instilled in the young mother fear and hatred of the father. Vivian's earliest years were passed with his unhappy mother whose influence transferred to the young son a similar distrust of the father. On her death, the father's judgment was keen enough to detect that though "the boy was apt to learn, the arduous task here was to unlearn", and for that task it would need

> either the passionless experience, the exquisite forbearance of a practiced teacher, or the love, and confidence, and yielding heart of a believing pupil.[63]

As this son's heart remained obstinately closed to him, the father felt compelled to select a stranger to mould the character of his boy. In the selection of a teacher the father's judgment erred. His choice fell on one whose qualifications in formal educational requirements were desirable, but who was utterly lacking in all that Roland desired his son to be taught.

> This preceptor taught his pupil after his own system--a mild and plausible one, very much like the system we at home are recommended to adopt, "Teach the understanding--all else will follow"; "Learn to read <u>something</u>, and it will all come right"; "Follow the bias of the pupil's mind; thus you develop genius, not thwart it."

Then follow the author's opinion of the current educational theories:

> Mind, understanding, genius--fine things! but to educate the whole man, you must educate something more than these....Where, in all this teaching was one lesson to warm the heart, and guide the soul?[64]

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[63] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 484.

[64] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 485.

Under the double handicap of an unhappy home and an unstable education, Vivian grew up to young manhood. Happily, and before he had reached a stage of utter degradation, Vivian fell into the hands of his exemplary cousin. Regeneration followed and eventually, through the shedding of his life's blood in his country's behalf, he restored his own good name.

Underneath Bulwer-Lytton's absurd sentimentality, however, is an acute awareness of changes taking place that will inevitably compel a broader educational scope. The wealthy Lord Castleton voices what was in the minds of progressive thinkers at that time when he says to Pisistratus:

> "I perceive a very different world rising round the next generation from that in which I first went forth and took my pleasure. I shall rear my boys accordingly. Rich noblemen must now-a-days be useful men."[65]

Another indication of Bulwer-Lytton's acuteness is found in his espousal of the cause of women's education. In his Leeds address he had said:

> It would be an honour and a credit to this institution if you could add female classes and endeavour as far as possible to fit women to be the worthy companions of intelligent men.[66]

He, thus, in the earlier years of the century, took up the cause of equality between men and women that Meredith later entered into so strenuously in his novels. That the trend toward a broader "book education" among girls was well on its way at the time The Caxtons was published, in indicated in a comment made by Pisistratus as to his mother's education:

> My mother though the daughter of a great scholar, possessed, I must own it fairly, less book-learning than many a humble tradesman's daughter can boast in this more enlightened generation.[67]

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[65] Ibid., p. 576.

[66] Victor A. Lytton, op. cit., p. 201.

[67] Bulwer-Lutton, op. cit., p. 27.

According to the women characters in the story, those belonging to the peerage had a superior education. Lady Elinore and her daughter, Fanny, and Lady Castleton, the mother of the first Lord Castleton, were spoken of as exceptional women. Lady Castleton is designated "a superior woman" and of Lady Elinor it is said: "Her mind was evidently cultivated with great care, but she was perfectly void of pedantry."[68] Blanche, the daughter of Roland Caxton, on the other hand, had instruction in French and Italian, music and art, but no mention is made of other knowledges. Blanche's education is similar to that of Jane Austen's girls, and, in fact, for practically all of the feminine characters in the fiction of this study. From The Caxtons, one gets the impression that Bulwer-Lytton was not desirous of a too finely educated mind in women. He attributes to the influence of the senior Lady Castleton's exceptional learning the stilted artificiality of her son, and he questions the happiness of married life with a woman of Lady Elinor's accomplishments. Of the latter Pisistratus remarks that Lady Elinor was probably the only woman his father had ever met who could be "the companion of his mind", but, as for his father, though he might have done more on earth, he would have been less fit for heaven, if he had married Lady Elinor."[69]

Even in this idealistic picture of family life, Bulwer-Lytton permits a place for the new type of woman emerging in the nineteenth century. In Lady Elinor Trevanion he recognizes and does not condemn the political woman. True

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[68] Ibid., p. 166.

[69] Ibid., p. 168.

he does not contemplate her as an office holder or a member of Parliament; her political status is one of influence rather than one of action. "A woman," the author says in the words of Lady Elinor, "can only indulge such ambition by investing it in another."[70] Bulwer-Lytton calls Lady Elinor "a grand daughter of the world, who was so superb a type of that moral contradiction--an ambitious woman."[71] Bulwer-Lytton concedes that the ambition of Lady Elinor was "irregular and not strictly feminine,"[72] "having to do with schemes or projects far beyond a woman's ordinary province of hearth and home."[73] But he does not believe with the great majority of his contemporaries that it was therefore questionable. "Although unusual," he writes, "such an ambition is still of no vulgar nor sordid kind."[74] With Lady Elinor, her ambition was stronger than her love, but at that time marriage was the only means through which a woman might attain a position of power. Of her marriage with Albert Trevanion, she says

> I loved less with my whole heart than with my whole mind....It was not wealth; it was not rank, that attracted me to Albert Trevanion; it was the nature that dispenses with the wealth, and commands the rank.

From her earliest childhood, Lady Elinor was ambitious,

> not as women usually are, of mere wealth and rank--but ambitious as noble men are, of power, and fame.[75]

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[70] Ibid., p. 414.

[71] Ibid., p. 415.

[72] Ibid., p. 420.

[73] Ibid., p. 416.

[74] Ibid., p. 420.

[75] Ibid., p. 414.

Bulwer-Lytton writes a justification for this type of marriage when he says that Lady Elinor

> linked her whole nature to one worthy of it, then her whole life became as fondly devoted to her husband's as if he had been the object of her affections;[76]

and when he has Lady Elinor say

> "I may say this now, for now every beat of this pulse is wholly and only true to him with whom I have grown as one; with whom I have shared the struggle, and now partake the triumph, realising the visions of my youth!"[77]

The tragedy of such a marriage comes not to the participants but to the offspring. Unless they too are imbued with the aspirations of their parents, they become the helpless victims of the ruthless force driving their elders. Bulwer-Lytton at times impresses us as being so much a politician himself and a power loving man that he was justifying in his story those parents who use their offspring as stepping stones for their ambitions. He was too political minded to underrate the importance of an ally working unobtrusively within a family circle. Fanny Trevanion was the victim of her parents' scheme of life. Both father and mother were equally in accord in their willingness to sacrifice her to their purposes. Bulwer-Lytton certainly does not condemn them. He was very lenient when he wrote of Lady Elinor as a mother:

> If ever her child was so secondary to her husband—if the fate of that child was but regarded by her as to be rendered subserviently to the grand destinies of Trevanion—still it was impossible to recognize the error of conjugal devotion without admiring the wife, though one might condemn the mother.[78]

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[76] Ibid., p. 420.

[77] Ibid., p. 414.

[78] Ibid., p. 420.

Lady Elinor explained her maternal duty as two-fold,

> it was not the daughter's happiness alone that she had to consult but her duty to her birthright as the sole representative of her mother's line and of her father's name.[79]

In exoneration of the father, Bulwer-Lytton had Mr. Trevanion explain his motives to Pisistratus when he had sought the hand of Fanny Trevanion:

> "My life falls to the ground, like a child's pyramid of cards, if I waste--I do not say on you, but on men ten times your fortune, the means of strength which are at my disposal in the hand of Fanny Trevanion. I have a stake in the world, won, not by fortune only, but the labour of a life, the suppression of half my nature--the drudging, squaring, taming down all that made the glory and joy of my youth—to be that hard matter-of-fact thing which the English world expect in a statesman!.....like all men in power, I must strengthen myself by other heads and hands than my own. My daughter shall bring to me the alliance of that house in England which is most necessary to me."

They planned unscrupulously, this father and mother, for the father dispassionately continued:

> "To this end I have looked; but to this end her mother has schemed—for these household matters are within a man's hopes, but belong to a woman's policy."[80]

When power was taken from these two ambitious ones in the later years of their life, it was said of Lady Elinor:

> She has made herself the true partner of his present occupation as she was of those in the past; she takes interest in farming, and gardens, and flowers.....After all this vexed public life of toil, and care, and ambition--Trevanion and Elinor, drawing closer and closer to each other, knowing private life and its charms for the first time.[81]

Thus does the author leave with the reader the vision of an ultimate goal of calm, serene home life.

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[79] Ibid., p. 416.

[80] Ibid., p. 264.

[81] Ibid., p. 579.

As in the case of the Trevanions, the author has always in mind his purpose of presenting a picture of a calm home life. The choice of his media prevents for the most part an overdrawn picture of his ideal. The selection of two opposite characters as Pisistratus and Vivian, permitted him to introduce his arguments with a nice balance and without undue straining of the reality of her presentation. Vivian was everything Pisistratus was not but in both the beneficent home influences of their early years were ever salutary forces acting within them. In Vivian's nature there was a capacity for strong affection for his mother. It was through this trait that Pisistratus and his father brought about Vivian's regeneration: "He could love his mother; tears gush to his eyes at her name—he would have starved rather than part with the memory of that love."[82] Home was the only place that Pisistratus could find solace in during his time of trial when he was trying to overcome his passion for Fanny Trevanion. He says,

> ....that home was my safeguard and preservative in the crisis of my life; its atmosphere of unpretended honour and serene virtue strengthened all my resolutions; it braced me for my struggles against the strongest passion which youth admits.[83]

And he follows this with his tribute to parents:

> How much we have before us in life, while we retain our parents! How much to strive and hope for! what a motive in the conquest of our sorrow—that they may not sorrow with us![84]

In the regeneration of Vivian the author is given opportunity in argumentative comment to introduce all the phases of an ideal home. In one discussion with

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[82] Ibid., p. 506.

[83] Ibid., p. 240.

[84] Ibid., p. 260.

Vivian, Austin Caxton explains what "the term Home menas to plain folk": "its perfect trust and truth, its simple holiness, its exquisite happiness--being to the world what conscience is to the human mind."[85] On the same occasion he brings in the obligation of a brother's duty to a sister to provide the care a father would if living

> to shield her innocence--to protect her name. A good name is something, then,

Austin argued,

> you would like yours to be that which your sister would be proud to own.[86]

Duty to one's name is a prominent feature of The Caxtons. It is brought out in the extreme reverence the old retired captain, Roland Caxton, had for his ancestors, and is peculiarly different from the snobbery of class distinction that marks the greater number of the novels of this period. With Roland Caxton his reverence is characterized by so deep a sense of moral obligation that it is a part of his religion, and with him, ranks higher than his duty as a parent. This he explains to Pisistratus,

> "The remotest ancestor has a right to our respect and consideration--for he was a parent. Honour your parents--the law does not say "Honour your children."[87]

This last sentiment is not merely representative of a character in fiction but is the expression of Bulwer-Lytton's own belief. We find a similar comment in one of his letters to his son, written in 1865:

> ...it is eno' to observe that every known nation above the savage has recognized as a cardinal law of piety the reverence due to parents from children, and said very little about the duties parents owe to children.[88]

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[85] Ibid., p. 511.

[86] Ibid., p. 511.

[87] Ibid., p. 306.

[88] Victor A. Lytton, op. cit., p. 415.

The author uses this theme in a slight plot within the main trend of the story. The Roland Caxtons, father and son and daughter are the principals and are in their unhappy family life the opposites of the simply contented members of the Austin Caxton family. The wayward son of Roland knowing his father would be vulnerable, bargains with his father's chivalrous reverence for his name for pecuniary independence. He promised never to molest his father in life and never to degrade him in death, and to change his name in order that his misdeeds would never reflect on the name that Roland prized so highly. Revolted and sickened by so unfilial a request, Roland acquiesced and to the world declared his son dead. Roland was comforted, however, for the narrator says

> ....amidst all his natural grief he was consoled. For he was less himself a father than a son—son to the long dead. From every grave where a progenitor slept, he had heard a parent's voice. He could bear to be bereaved, if the forefathers were not dishonoured.[89]

Roland's pride in his ancestry also took the appearance of pride in the old ancestral home. He used a family legacy to buy back the old castle of the early Caxtons. Roland's possession of the castle "was easily distinguished from the insolent boasts of the prosperous and was to him a pious reverence to the dead."[90] The reader feels a sense of permanence in the Caxton family now that Roland has the old home back. It is as a link binding together the past and the future into one present family. In its possession Roland has not only provided a common family center to facilitate intercourse among the living members of the family, but he has enabled them to maintain their hold

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[89] Bulwer-Lytton, op. cit., p. 307.

[90] Ibid., p. 510.

upon family spirit and tradition. The inclusion of this theme in The Caxtons would seem to indicate the author's belief in the power of the living spirit of the past to perpetuate the family spirit.

One feels that Bulwer-Lytton was definitely moralizing in The Caxtons. He has not neglected an opportunity for contrasting the good and bad in every domestic relation. The story has charm nevertheless, and is written with light and gentle humour. It is saved from a tone of artificiality by its many homely episodes such as are incident to any normal family. There is the delightful one on Pisistratus' passing into adolescence:

> I seemed to myself to have made a leap in life when I returned to school. I no longer felt as a boy. Uncle Jack, out of his own purse, had presented me with my first pair of Wellington boots; my mother had been coaxed into allowing me a small tail to jackets hitherto tailless; my collars, which had been wont, spaniel-like, to flap and fall about my neck, now, terrier-wise, stood erect and rampant....I was, in truth, nearly seventeen, and I gave myself the airs of a man.[91]

There is the picture of the simple, wholehearted courtesy to a departing guest: "Uncle Roland was going....and we all crowded round him as he stepped into his chaise."[92] When the story gets somewhat out of hand, as in Roland's eccentric attitude towards his ancestors, the author rescues it through a humorous thrust. Pisistratus says to his father and uncle who are disputing the authenticity of an ancestor:

> "It is quite clear that a man has no possession in posterity. Posterity may possess him, but deuce a bit will he ever be the better for his great-great-grandchildren."[93]

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[91] Ibid., p. 59.

[92] Ibid., p. 101.

[93] Ibid., p. 345.

The story is permeated by a spirit of serenity and fitness. It closes on a tone of contentment--that of the parents growing old happily and serenely, reliving in their children and their children's children. The mother of Pisistratus philosophically remarks of old age,

> I do think it requires a great sense of religion, or at all events, children of one's own, in whom one is young again, to reconcile oneself to becoming old.[94]

And the author designates grandchildren, as "Heaven's happy dream sent to grandparents; the rebaptism of Hope in the font whose drops sprinkle the grandchild."[95]

If at times, Bulwer-Lytton becomes rhapsodic, at other times he is capable of clear argument. He was progressive and alert and sounded the coming changes that were to affect family relations. His challenging phrase to education to produce "the well rounded figure" is as currently popular today as it was in its pioneering usage by Bulwer-Lytton in 1848. Little has been left out of family relations in The Caxtons, and while he purpose was definitely serious, there is a gentle humor pervading the story. The mutual affection of the Caxton family is finely indicated and in its influence, makes The Caxtons an important study of family life.

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[94] Ibid., p. 157.

[95] Ibid., p. 543.

CHAPTER II

TRANSITION ASPECTS OF DOMESTIC LIFE IN THE MIDDLE CENTURY

The England of this time represented a country dominated by one great fact—the Industrial Revolution. The inventions that had within the last seventy years substituted coal and iron for wood, steam for man or horsepower, machinery for handcraft, had broken up the old forms of society. One of the chief features of the new order was the rise of middle-class power to confront the established oligarchy of landowners. The captain of industry, the master-manufacturer, was in most cases a man who had mounted by his own efforts from an humble place to one of wealth and authority. He despised tradition for he had broken with the past. The political, economic and religious aspects of the new order of society interested Disraeli (1803-1881), who, from his particularly advantageous point of statesman had an opportunity for close study of these problems. His Coningsby (1844) is chiefly political, but it also covers the economic and religious phases of the new social order. It is included in this study for two aspects affecting family interests: for the great faith in youth that it teaches, and for being one of the first important written testimonies of the breakdown of class distinctions.

Coningsby is essentially a study of young men. Their school and university life and subsequent entrance into Parliament are sketched. Youth and the power of the individual are its constant theme. Through the new youth

that was emerging, Disraeli was attempting to elevate the tone of public life. Heretofore, youth was repressed, particularly in public life. It was characteristic of the middle and later Victorian epoch that experience—that knowledge which comes with age and wisdom—was the one thing respected. Youth, having little experience and no judgment was expected to walk in the footsteps of his elders. His ideas were not recognized. Disraeli brings this out in Lord Monmouth's reply to Coningsby when the latter told his grandfather he could not support the conservative party

"....as to your opinions,"

said Lord Monmouth,

"you have no business to have any other than those I uphold. You are too young to form opinions.....You go with your family, sir, like a gentleman; you are not to consider your opinion like a philosopher or a political adventurer"[1]

and closed the argument with this ultimatum,

"Members of this family may think as they like, but they must act as I please."[2]

Opposition from one as young as Coningsby was almost unprecedented. But the new social order had made its impress on the younger generation. Independence of thought and action were becoming noticeable. The young men in Coningsby illustrate it in their stand against the following of family precedent. Coningsby's friend, Eustace Lyle, a wealthy young landowner, puts into words the underlying thought of his generation:

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[1]Benjamin Disraeli, Coningsby, p. 341

[2]Ibid., p. 342.

> I gathered at an early age that it was expected that I was to inherit my father's political connections with the family estates. Under ordinary circumstances this would probably have occurred. In times that did not force one to ponder, it is not likely I should have recoiled from uniting myself with a party formed of the best families in England, and ever famous for accomplished men and charming women. But I enter life in the midst of a convulsion in which the very principles of our political and social systems are called in question. I cannot unite myself with the party of destruction. It is an operative cause alien to my being.[3]

The thought in Disraeli's work was the same as in Bulwer-Lytton's The Caxtons when the writer touches on public life:

> It was a time when the French Revolution had made statesmen look round with some anxiety to strengthen the existing order of things, by alliance with all in the rising generation who earned such ability as might influence their contemporaries.[4]

The Young England Movement was at its most flourishing stage. The power, the inspiration, and the splendour of youth were the fundamentals of its creed. Disraeli as well as a great number of his constituents, were youth conscious. Coningsby, in a manner, was propagandising youth, for, interpolated within the story are many epigrammatic phrases, as, "Genius when young is divine"; The history of heroes is the history of youth."[5] What Disraeli was attempting to do was to break down the old conventions of repression so that the enthusiasms of the young would be given free play. He realized that young people were subjected to a set pattern of conduct, which he considered a pernicious practice as well as a deadening one. Individual differences were disregarded, if even recognized. He writes:

> We are too apt to believe that the character of a boy is easily read. 'Tis a mystery the most profound. Mark what blunders parents constantly

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[3]Ibid., p. 121

[4]Bulwer-Lytton, The Caxtons, p. 204.

[5]Benjamin Disraeli, op. cit., p. 98.

> make as to the nature of their own offspring, bred too under their eyes, and displaying every hour their characteristics. How often in the nursery does the genius count as a dunce because he is pensive; while a rattling urchin is invested with almost supernatural qualities because his animal spirits make him impudent and flippant! The schoolboy above all others is not the simple being the world imagines. In that young bosom are often stirring passions as strong as our own, desires not less violent, a volition not less supreme. In that young bosom what burning love, what intense ambition, what avarice, what lust of power; envy that fiends might emulate, hate that no man might fear![6]

The refusal of parents to change their attitude toward their children was what resulted in that spirit of revolt against parental authority, that gave rise, at the close of the century to The Way of All Flesh, Samuel Butler's bitter satire on family life.

The conflict growing out of the love theme in Coningsby sustains interest in the tedious story, and connects up its political theme. It likewise introduces the question of class consciousness. Coningsby, the grand son of a wealthy peer, while visiting one of his Eton friends, Oswald Millbank, whose father represents the new political force of rich manufacturers, falls in love with the millowner's daughter, Edith. Their mutual attachment seemed hopeless of fulfilment until Coningsby met with financial reverses through his disinheritance by his grandfather. The fact of a Coningsby earning his own living was so unique a proceeding to Mr. Millbank that he was attracted to the young man, and later gave his consent to his marriage with his daughter. Before this transpired, however, the prejudices of class distinctions had to be broken down. The greatest struggle lay with the Millbank family; Coningsby strangely is pictured as a young aristocrat without class inhibitions. The early and constantly reiterated dogma of Mr. Millbank that "he

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[6] Ibid., p. 16.

belonged to a class debarred from its just position in the social system,"[7] had influenced his children toward a prejudice against every sentiment or institution of an aristocratic character. When Coningsby asked to marry Edith, her father in refusing his consent pictured the humiliation of Coningsby's own mother, a woman not of the peerage, at the hands of Coningsby's grandfather.

> Because they (the mother's family) were not noble, because they could trace no mystified descent from a foreign invader or the sacrilegious minion of some spoliating despot, their daughter was hunted from the family which should have exulted to receive her....I know enough to learn the misery that a woman may entail on herself by marrying out of her condition. I have bred my children in a respect for their class.[8]

Right here is noticeable a marked difference in independent thought and action between Coningsby's generation and that of his father's. Coningsby's father permitted his wife to be humiliated and thrust aside rather than cross his father's wishes. He thereby avoided economic disaster. Coningsby faced with the same alternative, chose to live his own life and was disinherited.

Disraeli achieved the plausibility of the breakdown of class barriers through the strong domestic character with which he endowed his hero. The portrait of Coningsby shows him a young boy about to have his first interview with his grandfather.

> All his experience of the ties of relationship, however limited, were full of tenderness and rapture. His memory often dwelt on his mother's sweet embrace....The image of his father was less fresh in his mind; but still it was associated with a vague sentiment of kindness and joy.

Disraeli continued

> To notice lesser sources of influence in his estimate of the domestic tie,

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[7] Ibid., p. 35.

[8] Ibid., p. 318.

> he had witnessed under the roof of Beaumanor, the existence of a family bound together by the most beautiful affections.[9]

Later, Coningsby is pictured as a young man, grown up as an orphan with no close family ties, visiting in the home of Edith Millbank:

> All the soft, social domestic sympathies of his nature which, however abundant, had never been cultivated, were developed by the life he was now leading. It was not merely that he lived in the constant presence, and under the constant influence of one whom he adored, that made him so happy. He was surrounded by beings who found felicity in the interchange of kind feelings and kind words; in the cultivation of happy talents and refined tastes; and the enjoyment of a life which their own good sense and own good hearts made them both comprehend and appreciate.[10]

Three pictures, Disraeli has given us, of ideal family life and affection, and with these as a background, he presented the final argument that broke down the barriers that separated Coningsby and Edith. It came from a member of the younger generation and followed the same strain of family affection.

> When Oswald computed the vast wealth which he knew was at his parent's command, and recalled Coningsby in his humble chambers toiling after all his noble efforts without any results, and his sister pining in a provincial solitude, Oswald began to curse wealth and to ask himself what was the use of all their marvellous industry and supernatural skill. He addressed his father with that irresistible frankness which a strong faith can alone inspire. What are the objects of wealth if not to bless those who possess our hearts? The only daughter, the friend to whom the only son was indebted for his life--here are two beings surely whom one should care to bless, and both are unhappy. Mr. Millbank listened without prejudice, for he was already convinced.[11]

Disraeli's two themes, greater freedom of the young and the elimination of class distinctions are thus linked with the domestic theme. Coningsby in a sense should not be included in this survey for Disraeli's interest in family

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[9] Ibid., p. 13.

[10] Ibid., p. 307.

[11] Ibid., p. 391.

life was only incidental to his story. But if ever there was an author writing for individualism, it was Disraeli writing on the theme of youth. The pertinence for us of his theme lies in the fact that he developed it through the medium of family life. He did not dissociate individualism and family relationships. Neither, in his theme of class distinctions did he attempt to break down the unity of family life that is founded upon respect. The Millbanks were as indomitable in their pride of class as was Coningsby.

Disraeli's themes were essentially political and thus in great contrast to those of Dickens, which are practically devoid of political thought. In so far as political laws affected the people injuriously, they were attacked by Dickens; otherwise Dickens was not interested. His novels were not written with the domestic theme as the purpose either, and therefore have not been included in this analysis of family life in English fiction. If we look on David Copperfield as everything that the boy Dickens had wanted in his youth or as the man Dickens had pictured as everything he did not have in boyhood, the story stands a family novel. If we also remember that with Dickens everything resolves itself into the teaching of goodness, then we can say that Dickens in David Copperfield was impressing the virtues of guarding the purities of home.

While Disraeli's novels reflected the political trends of the early Victorian period and Dickens' the humanitarian, and while both authors treated but incidentally the Victorian reactions to family life, Mrs. Gaskell's Ruth (1853) was truly the domestic representative of the period. The purpose of his novel was unexpected and reactionary. It was a courageous attempt to apply the teaching of Christian charity in the cause of illegiti-

mate motherhood. Mrs. Gaskell took the position that the error could be rectified by marriage and

> that not every woman who has fallen is depraved--that many crave and hunger after a chance for virtue--the help which no man gives to them--help--that gentle help which Jesus gave once to Mary Magdalen.[12]

Leniency for the unmarried mother was unprecedented in Mrs. Gaskell's day and for many years after. To fictionize the theme, attested the courage of the writer and to her sensitiveness to the revolution taking place in society. Mrs. Gaskell's own life is so typically a reflection of all the counteracting social currents of this transitional age that a biographical digression here is not out of place.

At no period in history was the bond of family regard and family duty so vividly put before the world. In all of Elizabeth Gaskell's writing this side of life is emphasized and it was equally so in her life. Her husband and she dwelt in amity, and to her children she was the ideal mother of the standard kind, making herself responsible for every part of their lives, and not allowing them to stray far away from their home and its influence.[13] Mrs. Gaskell engaged in parish work with her husband who was an Unitarian minister at Manchester. Her visits of charity gave her access to every type of workman's home. Here her eyes were opened to the evils of the prevailing doctrine of optimism that was ignoring the terrible side of life. She set to work to right certain abuses by writing of what she had seen. This is how Elizabeth Gaskell first broke open her bonds of domesticity and found herself an author and a reformer.

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[12]Mrs. Gaskell, Ruth, p. 350.

[13]Elizabeth Haldane, Mrs. Gaskell and Her Friends.

There was, in spite of new ventures, the obvious bowing to the conventions of the day. Repression of women was very real, particularly so to those who had any aspirations outside their home life. Women writers seldom wrote unless impelled to put their feelings into words by a sense of some social injustice that made them conquer their natural timidity—the injustice to the oppressed man or woman, whether political, social, or more frequently in the case of women, domestic. The letter from Robert Southey, 1837, to Charlotte Bronte in reply to her request for a criticism of her poems, is typical of the reception a literary woman received:

> Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not to be. The more she is engaged in her proper duties, the less leisure will she have for it, even as an accomplishment and a recreation.[14]

And for being thus peremptorily put into her place, Charlotte Bronte humbly replied:

> At the first perusal of your letter I felt only shame and regret that I had even ventured to trouble you with my crude rhapsody.....but after I had thought a little, and read it again and again, the prospect seemed to clear. You do not forbid me to write,.....you only warn me against the folly of neglecting real duties for the sake of imaginative pleasures; for the selfish excitement of emulation.....Once more allow me to thank you with sincere gratitude. I trust I shall never more feel ambitious to see my name in print.[15]

Mrs. Gaskell was troubled in a similar manner. She wrote to a friend of hers who had asked her advice about art as a pursuit for women immersed in home duties:

> .....it is just my puzzle: and I don't think I can get nearer to a solution than you have done....One thing is pretty clear, Women must give up living an artist's life if home duties are to be paramount....I am

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[14] Thomas Wise, The Brontes; Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence, Vol. I, p. 155.

[15] Ibid., p. 157.

> sure it is healthy for them to have the refuge of the hidden world of Art to shelter themselves in when too pressed upon by daily small Lilliputian arrows of peddling cares.....I have felt this in writing,--I see others feel it in Music, you in painting, so assuredly, a blending of the two is desirable. (Home duties and the devotion of the Individual, I mean)...but the difficulty is where and when to make one set of duties subserve and give place to the other. I have no doubt that the cultivation of each tends to keep the other in a healthy state.[16]

It was with great temerity then that Mrs. Gaskell published Mary Barton in 1848, and it required even greater courage to deal with the social problem that Ruth, 1853, presents. In Elizabeth Haldane's biography of Mrs. Gaskell is published some of the correspondence that passed between Mrs. Gaskell and her friends on the public reception of Ruth. It is quite illuminating on the Victorian taboo on sex. To a friend Mrs. Gaskell writes:

> An unfit subject for fiction is the thing they say about it. I knew all this before, but I determined notwithstanding to speak my mind out about it.....Deep regret is what friends here feel and express...I have spoken out my mind in the best way I can, and I have no doubt that what was meant so earnestly must do some good, though perhaps not all the good or not the very good I meant.[17]

In another letter addressed to her friend, Miss Fox:

> About Ruth, one of your London Libraries (Bell, I believe) has had to withdraw it from circulation on account of "its being unfit for family reading", and Spectator, Literary Gazette, Sharfer's Magazine, Colborn have all abused it as roundly as may be.[18]

In a letter dated 1853, Mrs. Gaskell writes of her reaction to the publicity Ruth received:

> I think I must be an improper woman without knowing it. I do so manage to shock people. Now should you have burnt the last volume of Ruth as so

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[16]Haldane, op. cit., p. 249.

[17]Ibid., p. 62.

[18]Ibid., p. 63.

> very bad? even if you had been a very anxious father of a family? Yet two men have and a third has forbidden his wife to read it, they sit next to us in Chapel and you can't think how "improper" I feel under their eyes.[19]

This final summation of her purpose in spite of all adverse comments is found in a letter of March 1853:

> I think I have put the small edge of the wedge in, if only I have made people talk and discuss the subject a little more than they did.[20]

One must keep in mind the times in order to understand this extraordinary attack on what appears to modern readers a perfectly harmless book dealing with a common situation in a pure-minded way.

The story of Ruth is not an unusual one. Ruth was a beautiful orphan girl apprenticed to a dressmaker. She, as other young people, enjoyed the companionship of girls and boys of her own age. She often spent her holidays with a young man whom she accidentally met through her work. One day she was seen by her employer under what the latter considered compromising circumstances and was dismissed. Ruth accepted the young man's invitation to go to Wales with him where in time he deserted her. Thurston Benson, a minister, and his sister took pity on her and gave her and her son a home with them. The complications of the story arose from the well meant deceit of Ruth's protectors in passing her off as a widow, and from the fact that they sheltered and befriended her. It was not with whole-hearted kindness that Miss Benson took Ruth and her infant in. Of such matters, Miss Benson held the views of her times. It was Mr. Benson that Mrs. Gaskell endowed with her

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[19] Ibid., p. 244.

[20] Ibid., p. 248.

advanced ideals of conduct. Thurston argued for Ruth's succor on the ground that through her son she would be purified. He pleaded:

> If her life has hitherto been self-seeking and wickedly thoughtless, here is the very instrument to make her forget herself and be thoughtful for another. Teach her...to reverence her child; and this reverence will shut out sin--will be purification,[21]

a sentiment that reminds one of Carlyle's theory of purification through suffering. Miss Benson's answer was that her brother's ideas were new to her.

> "I think, you Thurston, are the first person I ever heard rejoicing over the birth of an illegitimate child."

She concludes:

> "It appears to me rather questionable morality."[22]

He denied that he rejoiced, but in the birth of the son he saw the means of Ruth's regeneration. He pointed out that the world would condemn the child, confusing the sin with its consequences; that in its condemnation it too often hardened the mother's natural love into something like hatred. The responsibility of motherhood, he argued, is the same in this case as in all and the mother should be helped to assume it not as a heavy oppressive burden but as one that might become a blessing. Of the child he said that the world has made such children miserable, "innocent as they are", and that the mother should

> strengthen her child to look to God, rather than to man's opinion.
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> "It will be" he concludes " the discipline, the penance, she has incurred. She must teach her child to be (humanly speaking) self-dependent."[23]

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[21] Mrs. Gaskell, op. cit., p. 119.

[22] Ibid., p. 119

[23] Ibid., p. 121.

This was Mrs. Gaskell's theory. It was based on her religion, for she believed that much more emphasis be placed on consistency in conduct and belief than in simple faith.

Thurston Benson is not drawn as a perfect character. He succumbs with as little struggle as most ordinary people would to the temptation of evading the truth as the best expedient in the case of Leonard's birth. True, he consented to the subterfuge of the mother's widowhood not for himself but for the boy's sake, "for the world is so cruel" he said.

He forgot,

the author writes,

> what he had just said, of the discipline and penance to the mother consisting in strengthening her child to meet, trustfully and bravely, the consequences of her own weakness. He remembered more clearly the wild fierceness, the Caine-like look of another, as the obnoxious word in the baptismal registry told him that he must go forth branded into the world, with his hand against every man's, and every man's against him.[24]

Of this decision, Mrs. Gaskell says,

> It was the dicision--the pivot, on which the fate of the years moved; he turned it the wrong way.[25]

And Leonard for whom he sinned, was the greatest sufferer. When Leonard was ten years old the truth became known and their little world was even more vehement in its cruelty for the deceit practiced upon it. The Bensons suffered as much ostracism as Ruth and Leonard for convention looked with suspicion upon those who were merciful to a sinner. Sally, the sixty-year old servant of the Bensons objected to living in the same house as Ruth for fear of losing her character through association. "I only hope I shan't lose

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[24] Ibid., p. 122.

[25] Ibid., p. 122.

my character," said Sally, "and me a parish clerk's daughter."[26] Mr. Bradshaw, whose children Ruth taught and with whom Leonard played, expressed the same sentiment as the servant: "That very child and heir to shame to associate with my own innocent children! I trust they are not contaminated."[27] Altogether the circumstances arising were tragic for everyone. Even so, Miss Benson felt their action justifiable; she argued:

> Ruth has had some years of peace, in which to grow stronger and wiser, so that she can bear her shame now in a way she never could have done at first.[28]

Mr. Bradshaw, the most ostentatiously religious person in the community, was responsible for the public condemnation of Ruth and Leonard. Mrs. Gaskell was severely criticised by her contemporaries for her use of deceit, but there is no criticism of Mr. Bradshaw's dual religious personality. Mr. Bradshaw was the product of his time, truthfully drawn; one who was unable to distinguish between morals and conventionality. To Mrs. Gaskell's critics, there was nothing incongruous in Mr. Bradshaw's actions. Mr. Benson really belongs to a later era than that in which he lived. He saw beyond the limits of Christianity as it was then practiced for the most part, and while the trait of dishonesty is incompatible to his general type, he was sketched in an individualistic mold.

When it became necessary to tell Leonard of his birth, Ruth felt she must be the one to tell him,

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[26] Ibid., p. 148.

[27] Ibid., p. 340.

[28] Ibid., p. 361.

> She must face him, and see the look in his eyes, before she knew whether he recoiled from her; he might have his heart turned to hate her, by their cruel jeers.[29]

She determined to use the terms that she knew would be used of her by outsiders in order that the full force of the situation would be comprehended by Leonard and that he should hear those words applied to his mother first from her own lips. But here Mrs. Gaskell returns to her original thesis, that the greatest help to such as Ruth would come from the feeling of reverence they bore their children. Ruth was stopped in her utterance

> by the influence of his presence—for he was a holy and sacred creature in her eyes, and this point remained steadfast, though all the rest were upheaved-----; and now it seemed as if she could not find words fine enough, and pure enough, to convey the truth that he must learn, and should learn from no tongue but hers.[30]

Again in connection with the manner in which Leonard reacted to the knowledge of his birth, Mrs. Gaskell reverted to her theory of an illegitimate child being

> a law unto himself; Leonard was gradually adjusting himself. At present there was no harmony in Leonard's character; he was as full of thought and self-consciousness as many men, planning his actions long beforehand, so as to avoid what he dreaded,-----and shrinking from hard remarks..... The hopeful parts of his character were the determination evident in him to be a "law unto himself" and the serious thought which he gave to the formation of this law.[31]

Mrs. Gaskell continues her theme that as Ruth was assisted to virtue by the help and solace of the Bensons, she in turn as a mother and by her

> lovely patience, and her humility,

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[29] Ibid., p. 341.

[30] Ibid., p. 343.

[31] Ibid., p. 383.

and her quiet piety

> called out the reverence of her child and was softly leading him up to God.[32]

It had been customary in life as well as in fiction to grant respectability to an unwed mother if she married. Mrs. Gaskell with equal courage also attacks this convention. Ruth was given the opportunity to wed her former lover but refused. It was before Leonard learned her past. The terms of the proposal were such that Leonard would be protected from the facts of his birth and would be given the advantages a wealthy father could provide for his son. For Ruth it was a great temptation. But she did not love Mr. Bellingham any more, and she felt that the evil of a marriage without love was greater than any evil that could befall her or her son. Marriage for women, it would appear from this middle nineteenth century novel, was becoming the moral institute that Jane Austen was striving for in her satiric picture of marriage at any cost.

Although the emancipation of women is in the main a twentieth century phenomenon, the movement toward equal right and equal opportunities took its rise in the Victorian era. We have seen how Mrs. Gaskell and her contemporaries sought to break down the barriers that were repressing their sex. Wilkie Collins (1824-1889), writing in these years did much in his fiction to further the freedom of women in their married life. One of the abuses he wrote against was the relinquishment by married women of their personal property rights. The Married Women's Property Act that gave women control

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[32] Ibid., p. 384.

of their own money was not passed until 1882, but Wilkie Collins took up this cause in his novel The Woman in White, published in 1860. The interest of Collins in this phase of marriage grew out of his legal training. His treatment of his subject matter differed from the straight forwardness of Mrs. Gaskell. He worked into an intricate plot the manipulations of two unscrupulous characters to obtain the fortune of the heroine, Laura Fairlie. Mystery and intrigue and love mark his story. Along with his interesting tale, he introduced a plea for a higher standard in marital relations based on the economic equality of the sexes. The fact that married women were too utterly dependent economically on their husbands left them unguarded against abuses that the law did not even protect them from.

Laura Fairlie contracted a loveless marriage in compliance with a promise she had made to her dying father. She, in a truly Victorian renunciatory manner gave up the man she loved for one of her father's choice, Sir Percival Glyde. The only interest Sir Percival had in Laura was to obtain possession of her fortune. He had no shadow of a claim to expect more than a share in her income but in the marriage settlement he insisted on having the principal signed over to him. Laura's guardian was a pampered bachelor who shunned the burden of his trust by consenting to anything that would release him from annoyance. Sir Percival easily won his way over the protests of the old family friend and lawyer, William Gilmore, who saw the menace to Laura in the marriage settlement. "He would decline on the grounds of common legal caution," he said, "to give the husband under any circumstances whatever an interest of twenty thousand pounds in his wife's death."[33]

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[33]Wilkie Collins, The Woman in White, p. 140.

Collins drew Laura not as a weak character but as one capable of courageous action on occasion. This fact Sir Percival discovered when he tried to force her to act against her will when she had the right to refuse. Although Laura had nothing to say as to the disposal of her own fortune, there were times, after her marriage when her signature was necessary to legal documents. It was on one such occasion that Sir Percival was balked by Laura's defiance. Not being told what she was to sign she questioned Sir Percival. The humiliation to Laura in the scene that followed was what Collins wished to make significant to his readers. The stability of married life could never be assured if the causes for such occasions were allowed to persist. Sir Percival answered to Laura's query by saying he had no time to explain, and further, that if he had time she would not be able to understand, as the document was full of legal technicalities. She persisted in an explanation, quoting how Mr. Gilmore had always given her one. Sir Percival's answer is typical of his kind, "Mr. Gilmore was your servant, and was obliged to explain. I am your husband, and am not obliged."[34] It was of no significance that it was Laura's money originally that Sir Percival was so high handed about.

This same occasion called attention to another humiliation imposed on women. Count Fosco and his wife were asked to witness Laura's signature. The Count refused to have the Countess do so, explaining that though under English law man and wife could be witnesses of the same document, he questioned the legality of the law. If circumstances arose in which the separate

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[34] Ibid., p. 217.

opinions of the witnesses were required "independent the one of the other", the signature of his wife's would be worthless "because," he said, "we have but one opinion between us, and that opinion is mine."[35] One gets a better insight into the character of Countess Fosco after such words as her husband just uttered, and Collins is able to give a better picture of foreboding where the relations between man and wife are as pictured in his novel. The story says of the Countess that before her marriage to Count Fosco she was a vivacious flirt,

> always talking pretentious nonsense. Now, she sits for hours together without saying a word, frozen up in the strangest manner in herself... For the common purposes of society, the extraordinary change thus pro - duced in her is a change for the better.

The author here adds this very careful stroke

> How far she is really reformed or deteriorated in her secret self, is another question. I have once or twice seen sudden changes of expression on her pinched lips, and heard sudden inflexions of tone in her calm voice, which have led me to suspect that her present state of suppression may have sealed up something dangerous in her nature, which used to evaporate harmlessly in the freedom of her former life.[36]

If misadventure had not fallen upon Sir Percival, the probably effect of Laura's married life upon her character would have been as disquieting. Collins describes in one place Laura's reactions to the man she wanted to marry and to the humble home he would have provided for her. Her sentiments are so at variance to those of her actual life that a deterioration is not an impossible result. Laura speaking of Walter Hartright and the life she might be living, says to Marian, her half-sister:

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[35] Ibid., p. 215.

[36] Ibid., p. 192.

> I used to think of him when Percival left me alone at night to go among the Opera people. I used to fancy what I might have been if it had pleased God to bless me with poverty, and I had been his wife. I used to see myself in my neat cheap gown, sitting at home and waiting for him while he was earning our bread--sitting at home and working for him and loving him all the better because I had to work for him--seeing him come in tired and taking off his hat and coat for him, and Marian, pleasing him with little dishes at dinner that I had learnt to make for his sake.[37]

This idyllic picture of life should eliminate any chance supposition that Collins was not an advocate of an economic sharing in married life. He was picturing a marriage state based on a respect that can only come where equality is balanced in every respect, irrespective of environmental circumstances. Until the law protected the married woman economically in her own right, he felt that a danger to marital life existed.

With the novels of Anthony Trollope (1815-1882) domestic fiction is presented in a new environment. Trollope published a series of tales about life in a cathedral city where the clergy form the leading social caste. Among these stories is Barchester Towers (1857) an idyllic account of ecclesiastical life without the clerical details being essential elements. Trollope was unfamiliar with the technicalities of a clergyman's life, but he was familiar enough with human nature to know that it remains the same however appareled.

If we look to our clergymen to be more than men,

he writes in Barchester Towers

> we shall probably teach ourselves to think they are less, and can hardly hope to raise the character of the pastor by denying to him the right to entertain the aspirations of a man.[38]

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[37] Ibid., p. 231.

[38] Anthony Trollope, Barchester Towers, p. 8.

Clerical garb and cathedral setting were chosen by the author more because they were innovations in English fiction than for any other reason. A cursory glance of Barchester Towers in regard to the religious aspects in the family fails to disclose anything more spiritual than Christianity as it is ordinarily practiced. Barchester Towers is aimply a charming story of domestic life. The leisurely unfolding of the plot with no more thrilling situations than neighborly visits, family jars, clerical conclaves, and an occasional reception or garden party is reminiscent of the domestic comedy of Jane Austen, Marie Edgeworth, and Mrs. Gaskell. Barchester Towers is a story principally of minor strifes, of conflicts and rivalries growing out of that trait of human nature that yearns for power. In every case some domestic aspect is involved. Dr. Grantly yearns for a bishopric and is divided in his loyalty to his dying father; Dr. Proudie is given the bishopric but is dominated by his power loving wife; Eleanor Bold is all but ostracized by her family for having a suitor not in sympathy with the Grantly interests; Mrs. Quiverful is willing to risk her good name to wrest the wardenship of Herman's Hospital from Mr. Harding for her husband.

Domestic betterment is as much a theme in Barchester Towers as it is in the other novels studied. Where clerical preferment was not its goal, marriage was. Trollope displayed his very close understanding of human nature in depicting the motives and the methods by which the simple, ordinary people of his story obtain their object. The story opens with Dr. Grantly's ordeal of loyalty versus ambition. The scene is developed in Trollope's characteristic strain of irony. The old bishop is dying and his son yearns for the bishopric. As Dr. Grantly sorrowfully watches at the bedside of his slowly

dying father, he is harassed with a guilty fear that the ministry from whom he expects election will be dissolved before his father dies. Dr. Grantly is torn by filial love and worldly ambition. Of Dr. Grantly the story states:

> **The son returned** to his father's room....and sat down by the bedside **to calculate** his chances. The ministry were to be out within five days; his father was to be dead within----no, he rejected that view of the subject-----. He tried to keep his mind away from the subject, but he could not. The race was very close, and the stakes were so very high. ----But by no means easy were the emotions of him who sat there watching. Thus he thought long and sadly, in deep silence, and then gazed at that still living face, and then at last dared to ask himself whether he really longed for his father's death. The effort was a salutary one and the question was answered in a moment. The proud, wishful, worldly man sank on his knees, by the bedside, and taking the bishop's hand within his own, prayed eagerly that his sins might be forgiven him.[39]

And when his father had drawn his last breath Trollope observes ironically,

> The archdeacon's mind had travelled from the death chamber to the closet of the Prime Minister. He had brought himself to pray for his father's life, but now that that life was done, minutes were too precious to be lost. It was now useless to dally with the fact of the bishop's death--useless to lose perhaps everything for the pretence of a foolish sentiment.[40]

Dr. Grantly's desire for the bishopric was not actuated by financial reasons, his father had left him great wealth. But as Trollope describes his ambition:

> ....he certainly did desire to sit in full lawn sleeves among the peers of the realm; and he did desire, if the truth must out, to be called "My Lord" by his reverend brethren.[41]

Mr. Quiverful was likewise anxious for a higher clerical preferment, but he was actuated by far different motives than was Dr. Grantly. He needed a financial raise in order to bring up "as ladies and gentlemen fourteen

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[39] Ibid., pp. 2,3.

[40] Ibid., p. 5.

[41] Ibid., p. 9.

children" which with his present income he was not able to do, it being even "insufficient to give them with decency the common necessaries of life."[42] The wardenship of Herman's Hospital being opened this harassed father, abetted by the equally overburdened mother, used every worldly wile they were capable of to get the appointment. The cohorts of Mr. Harding were equally desirous of making his later years a little less meagre through the same appointment. The manner of their campaign was dictated by the direness of their need. The families and family friends ramified their strength to Mr. Harding's support whereas Mr. Quiverful was thrown on his own resources. Trollope understood how a father in Mr. Quiverful's situation would act and with ironic comment, defends him and his wife. Of Mr. Quiverful, he says,

> he was an honest painstaking drudgery man; anxious indeed for bread and meat...anxious also to be right with his own conscience;

Here falls Trollope's contrasts of the two contingencies,

> he was not careful, as another might be who sat on an easier worldly seat, to stand well with those around him, to shun a breath which might sully his name, or a rumor which might affect his honour. He could not afford such niceties of conduct, such moral luxuries. It must suffice for him to be ordinarily honest according to the ordinary honesty of the world's ways, and to let men's tongues wag as they would.[43]

And so with Mrs. Quiverful, she is pictured as the eternal mother fighting for her brood. Whereas Mr. Quiverful was held back to some extent by the "frowns of dean, archdeacon, or prebendary", she had no such qualms.

> To her the outsides and insides of her husband and fourteen children were everything. In her bosom every other ambition had been swallowed up in that maternal ambition of seeing them and him and herself duly clad and properly fed. It had come to that with her that life had now

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[42] Ibid., p. 214.

[43] Ibid., p. 301.

no other purpose.[44]

The Stanhope family relied upon marriage as their greatest surety for domestic easement; and Mrs. Bold as its most promising solution. The moneyless dilettante of the family, Bertie Stanhope is good naturedly but half heartedly thrust into the matrimonial campaign by his sisters. Mr. Slope is another aspirant for the controlling hand on Mrs. Bold's wealth. But Trollope had other designs. As a book on domestic manners his final gesture in every case is to leave a picture of domestic tranquility brought about through compatibility of one sort or another. Mr. Arabin enters into this scene, actuated by those sentiments that go to make the truest marriages. The reader is introduced to him a bachelor of forty soliloquizing on marriage. The author describes him as a man who was

> utterly alone in the world as regarded domestic ties and those inner familiar relations which are hardly possible between others than husbands and wives, parents and children, or brothers and sisters.

The author goes on to say that Mr. Arabin

> had often discussed with himself the necessity of such bonds for a man's happiness in the world, and had generally satisfied himself with the answer that happiness in this world is not a necessity.

Trollope's conclusion is that

> herein he deceived himself, or rather tried to do so.[45]

It is said of him on his first visit to the archdeacon's home:

> He regarded the wife and children of his friend with something like envy; he all but coveted the pleasant drawing room, with its pretty windows opening on to lawns and flowerbeds, the apparel of the comfortable house and--above all,--the air of home which encompassed

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[44] Ibid., p. 216.

[45] Ibid., p. 174.

it all.[46]

Of this formerly complacent bachelor of forty Trollope remarks:

> Not for wealth, in its vulgar sense, had he ever sighed; not for the enjoyment of rich things had he ever longed. But for the allotted share of worldly bliss, which a wife, and children, and happy home could give him, for that usual amount of comfort which he had ventured to reject as unnecessary for him, he did now feel that he would have been wiser to have searched.[47]

Trollope's family pictures in Barchester Towers are unique in the tranquillity that comes from perfect understanding. Which perhaps is his solution of marital troubles. Dr. and Mrs. Grantly lived in close harmony, due no doubt to Mrs. Grantly's intelligence,

> She knows how to assume the full privilege of her rank and express her own mind in becoming tone and place. But Mrs. Grantly's sway, if sway she has, is easy and beneficient....Doubtless she values power, and has not unsuccessfully striven to acquire it; but she knows what should be the limits of a woman's rule.

Dr. Proudie's home life presents a different picture, but after somewhat of a conflict, it too assumes an air of tranquility due this time to the husband's good judgment. Of Mrs. Proudie, it is written,

> But Mrs. Proudie is not satisfied with home dominion, and stretches her power over all the bishop's duties, and will not even abstain from things spiritual.

Trollope succinctly adds

> In fact, the bishop is henpecked...All hope of defending himself has long passed from him; indeed he rarely even attempts self-justification;and is aware that submission produces the nearest approach to peace which his own house can ever attain.[48]

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[46] Ibid., p. 174.

[47] Ibid., p. 175.

[48] Ibid., pp. 26, 27.

The Dr. Stanhope family portraiture is of another sort of tranquility. The author states that

> the great family characteristic of the Stanhopes might probably be said to be heartlessness; but this want of feeling was in most of them, accompanied by so great an amount of good nature as to make itself but little noticeable to the world.....Their conduct to each other was the same as to the world; they bore and forbore; and there was sometimes....much necessity for forbearing; but their love among themselves rarely reached above this.

The author adds this elucidating sentence--

> It is astonishing how much each of the family was able to do, and how much each did, to prevent the well being of the other.[49]

The solving of the economic problems of Barchester Towers brings out a higher type of family unity. Trollope solves the question of the dependence of old parents on their children in a manner different to Thackeray's handling of the Sedley parents. Here in the case of the gentle Mr. Harding there is no degeneration of character but rather a strengthening. Mr. Harding on losing the wardenship of Hiram Hospital found himself in straightened circumstances. He was sorely tempted to accept very comfortable quarters with his "beloved Eleanor," but "he could not," the story tells us, "be prevailed upon to forego the possession of some small home of his own, and so remained in the lodgings he had at first selected over a chemist's shop in the High Street of Barchester."[50] The Quiverfuls present a different financial question. The solving of their difficulty is a happy incident in this account of family life in English fiction. The economic problem of fourteen children

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[49] Ibid., p. 62.

[50] Ibid., p. 15.

and a meager income was a baffling one, not the least of its burden are the bitterness and the secret guilty criticisms that are subtly felt by the parents. Every picture of the Quiverfuls as a family, has shown nothing but love and forbearance between husband and wife, between children and parents. Trollope, in the happy scene of the parents and children rejoicing over the father's appointment as warden of the hospital, has done much to convince one of the Victorian Englishman's belief in the existence of the family spirit.

Barchester Towers is characterized by humorous romantic realism, and by pleasant domesticity. Trollope doesn't touch on any momentous crises here, nor on any very important family issues. He tells his story of simple small town life so convincingly, and his characters react so realistically, that however small the event it becomes as important in the eyes of the reader as those of the actors. His most reprehensible characters do so little harm, if any, that the domestic scene remains unclouded. In Barchester Towers Trollope has given us a legacy of home life of England as no other writer analyzed in this study has equalled. He had a genius for simply telling the simple life, the home life of the British race.

George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss (1860) has been included here for a brief survey because of its study of brother and sister relations. George Eliot's works on the whole are not interpretative of family life; her interest lies in the individual character. The Mill on the Floss, however, uses the idea of childhood influences and home associations as forces active through out life. The story is about the conflict of wills between Maggie Tulliver and her brother, Tom, and how each was conquered by the memories of the youth they had spent together. In the contest between them Maggie dominates;

but Tom is not drawn as a character of negligible firmness. George Eliot had too great a grasp of character and too great a dramatic sense to have Tom other than an independent person of strong characteristics. Tom apparently dominates his sister in that part of the story where he was instrumental in parting Maggie from Philip Waken. This episode is interesting from two points of view; one, from the light it throws on social conventions still persisting in George Eliot's time in regard to women's position; and the other, in that view of family relations which is so persistently common, that one will perhaps always witness its exploitation. As for the first, modern readers see in Maggie's docility to her brother, what has been objected to as too weakly feminine for one of her assertive, passionate nature, and her greater intelligence. John Macy in his article, "George Eliot, Victorian Queen, explains what appears to be the flaw in this character sketch as

> a submission of circumstance, of set social law, by which the male actually had authority and could command obedience.[51]

It is just another instance of a woman author, urged on by the force of the rising movement for social equality of men and women, to subtly interject into her story, an incongruity that is striking enough to arrest the attention of the thoughtful reader, and thereby hope to initiate a solution of this problem. The second point of interest lies in the fact that Maggie's devotion to her father is used as a weapon by Tom

> ...he shall know if you attempt to use deceit towards me any further[52]

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[51] John Macy, "George Eliot, Victorian Queen", Bookman, April, 1932, p. 22.

[52] George Eliot, The Mill on the Floss, p. 394.

Tom answers to Maggie's trembling question whether her father knew of her attachment for the son of his bitterest enemy.

The background of the story and the minor incidents are important factors in George Eliot's purpose. For instance, the author has been careful in building up the concept of home, not to dissociate the subjective from the physical. Reference to the simple, everyday intimacies of family life and to the familiar objects of associations constantly recur in her story. We find descriptive phrases, such as "the bright light in the parlor"; "the pattern of the rug and grate"; the fire-irons; "the kisses and smiles of that familiar hearth"; the gig passing noiselessly over the snow covered bridge"[53] and so on; and in every instance the author uses them not as word photographs of a physical scene but as a background on which to focus the meaning of home that lies in the hearts of her characters. Besides building this background, George Eliot uses as a minor theme pride in ancestral heritage. It reminds one of Bulwer-Lytton's The Caxtons and differs only in the fact that Roland Caxton traced his forebears back through centuries of warriors, whereas George Eliot's prototype comes from humble, peaceful stock; from generations of mill-owners. In the veins of both, however, courses the same instinct—pride in family name. The nineteenth century writers, whether finding their ideal character among simple folks or among those of higher class, have not failed to have been impressed by this universal trait. In The Mill on the Floss, the pride of good workmanship is no less a worthy family heirloom to pass on from generation to generation, than the pride of great deeds. In

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[53] George Eliot, op. cit., p. 308.

each, the family name becomes known and honored. We can understand why Edward Tulliver "took service under John Wakem, the man as had helped to ruin him" because, as he had his son Tom write in the family bible "I wanted to die in the old place where I was born and where my father was born."[54] The old home was "part of his life--part of himself."[55]

We frequently come across expressions in the novel showing the backward thought in George Eliot's mind, as, "The wood I walk in--far-off years which still live in us and transform our perception of love."[56] She refers so often to the theme that the thoughts and loves of childhood would always make part of one's life despit the changes of time, that we are prepared for the manner in which the author motivates the reconciliation of Tom and Maggie. We are told how Maggie forgot the antagonisms of the years and went to rescue Tom from the flood waters. How, with destruction bearing down upon them, they lived through again

> in one supreme moment the days when they had clasped their little hands in love and roamed the daisied fields together.[57]

We consider the picture of faith in the lasting bond between brothers and sisters of a happy childhood, George Eliot's greatest contribution to the family theme in English fiction. She has consistently established her belief in the power of the forces emanating from the home to keep intact the unity of family life. The Mill on the Floss is so written that her belief is not limited to any time in history; it is a story for all time.

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[54] Ibid., p. 361.

[55] Ibid., p. 359.

[56] Ibid., p. 257.

[57] Ibid., p. 475.

CHAPTER III

AGGRESSIVE TENDENCIES WITHIN THE FAMILY GROUP OF THE LATE CENTURY

The failure of the people of the great mid-decade of the nineteenth century to adapt themselves to the mighty changes for which they were responsible, accounts for the satiric studies of society we find in the fiction of the second half of the century. These placid, smug mid-Victorians pinned their faith to change, or, as they called it, progress, and left adaptation for chance or providence to provide. With the humanitarians, English fiction left the field of the picaresque heroic for that of the level of contemporary life. So impelled were they by sympathy to overcome social abuses, that they in turn created an atmosphere of false sentiment that was as equally a distortion of reality as that which preceded them. Thackeray protested against the falsity to life fiction had displayed, and through his works brought the novel once more into the field of realism. His material was of the upper classes wherein lay his experience. He was unsparing in his criticism of the efforts of this ambitious class to rise to the ranks of aristocracy by wealth alone, and of its effort at imitating the manner and foibles of the great. Pride in social position was not a negligible quality, however, in Thackeray; but his pride was centered in the position in which ancestry placed one; in the dignity of a social position founded upon an organization of families through successive generations. This was his ideal of a social system--one that could show the solidarity of the family institution.

Vanity Fair and The Newcomes, the two books under consideration here, are authentic studies of upper-class society in England as he knew it. The family pictures presented are as typical as similar groups in actual life, and as real as the conventions would permit them to be. Thackeray being the realist that he was found it irksome to submit to the dictates of a society that refused to face the facts of life. Although he submitted to the prohibitions of the public, he went so far as to insert a note of protest in the preface to Pendennis (1850):

> Since the author of Tom Jones was buried, no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a Man. We must drape him, and give him a certain conventional simper. Society will not tolerate the natural in our Art.[1]

Thackeray in this utterance was but sounding the murmurings of the people against the general practice of evading the truth; he was indicating the aggressive, social attitude that society was assuming.

Thackeray looked upon mid-Victorian England with eyes that saw everywhere snobbishness and the mania for display. In Vanity Fair (1848) he created characters of many types, all of whom scheme and fret and ache for that which is not worth while. Technically, Vanity Fair is a study of the individuals who have become helplessly involved in the tragedy of those who have sought after false gods. Where the family circle is affected, the calamity is poignantly felt. The elderly Sedley amassed a fortune, only to die, a childish old man, forgotten and in poverty. Thackeray realized that certain kinds of duress that arise from a lack of means also can be debilitating and disintegrating. According to this character pattern, he drew

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[1] William Makepeace Thackeray, Pendennis, p. xlviii.

both Mr. and Mrs. Sedley; but of the two, Mrs. Sedley's is the more tragic figure. In the beginning, Mrs. Sedley took the news of their ruin heroically and comforted and encouraged Mr. Sedley.

> ....her faithful voice and simple caresses wrought this sad heart up to an inexpressible delight and anguish, and cheered and solaced his overburdened soul.[2]

Time and dire need took from her, however, "her bustling idleness and daily easy avocations"[3] and left her with nothing. Mr. Sedley's pathetic efforts to retrieve the fortune were, despite their futility, something at least to keep alive a spark of his old genial self; to give him somewhat of an outlet for the anguish of his failure. Mrs. Sedley's interests in the fashionable world being taken from her, she had nothing to turn her hand to. She became a "soured old lady" who spent much time with the cook in the kitchen, "the only ground on which she felt she was in a position of patronage."[4] The bitterness of poverty had poisoned the life of this once cheerful and kindly woman, and changed her from a loving mother into a complaining, exacting old woman. She died, estranged from her daughter.

Amelia was the victim of her father's ambition as well, but her nature was better fortified to withstand poverty. Her greater ordeal came through her association with the ambition of her father-in-law, Mr. Osborne. He sacrificed every affection, even that of his only son George, to his unnatural

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[2]William Makepeace Thackeray, Vanity Fair, p. 166.

[3]Ibid., p. 165.

[4]Ibid., p. 495.

craving for wealth and power. He had, before Mr. Sedley's ruin, been a close friend of the Sedley family. The two fathers had even gone so far as to pledge their son and daughter in marriage as a bond of mutual esteem. Although Mr. Osborne admitted he owed much to Mr. Sedley in the way of making his fortune and of bringing his tallow business to a proud position in the trade of the city, when misfortune came to his benefactor, he was Mr. Sedley's most determined and obstinate opponent. He wrote to the Sedley's canceling his son's engagement to Amelia, and to his son he said he saw no reason why he shouldn't marry higher than a stockbroker's daughter. The marriage of George and Amelia brought happiness to none. The elder Osborne disowned George and clung pertinaciously to his anger, not even permitting the knowledge of his son's death on the field of battle, to soften him toward Amelia and her son George. He destroyed the happiness of his own life, "he daily grew more violent and moody" and wrecked any semblance of domestic tranquility within his home. Of his daughter, the only companion of his old age, the story describes her

> with her fine carriage and her fine horses, and her name on half the public charity lists of the town, as a lonely, miserable, persecuted old maid.[5]

She is thus pictured another innocent victim caught in the whirl of "Vanity Fair." Even when the elder Osborne finally offered to take his grandson, the offer of assistance was not extended to the mother. His help hinged on the cold-blooded business proposition that Amelia would agree to give up the boy entirely to his keeping. It was only after a terrific struggle that

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[5] Ibid., p. 462.

Amelia consented to his proposition. She was conquered by her own family. She had to decide between herself and her own rights as a mother and the needs of her parents. The thought of poverty and misery for all, want and degradation for her parents, injustice to the boy, if she did not consent, faced her. Her son was all she had, but his existence had now become to the grandfather, a part of his thirst for ascendancy. In the young George, he saw his dreams reborn. Fate had another cruel thrust for this gentle mother. George left for his grandfather's, the story tells us, "elated than otherwise and the poor woman turned sadly away".[6] With the comment of the author, "By heaven it is pitiful, the bootless love of women for children in Vanity Fair"[7] another thread of his theme of the innocent victim of man's unworthy strivings is completed.

The pitiful childhood of the young Rawdom Crawley illustrates further Thackeray's theory of the tragic involvement of the helpless. For the tragedies that family life is subjected to, Thackeray had real sympathy and for none more so than those brought about through neglectful motherhood. Thackeray's soul was domestic by instinct. His great sorrow in the affliction to his wife which deprived his own children of a mother's love and care, undoubtedly influenced the inclusion of the motherhood theme in the sketch of Rebecca Sharpe. As consistent with her character, Rebecca recognized her motherhood only when the prerogative could be advantageous to her own ends. Whereas her son, with all of childhood's belief in and love of beauty, worshipped her as a fairy-princess. Of the boy's love, Thackeray writes:

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[6] Ibid., p. 501.

[7] Ibid., p. 502.

> Oh, thou poor lonely little benighted boy! Mother is the name for God in the lips and hearts of little children, and here was one who was worshipping a stone![8]

The young Rawdon is pictured as

> a fine open-faced boy....sturdy in limb, but generous and soft in heart; fondly attaching himself to all who were good to him—to the pony—to Lord Southdown, who gave him the horse—to the groom who had charge of the pony—to Molly, the cook, who crammed him with ghost stories at night, and with good things from dinner—to Briggs, whom he plagued and laughed at—and to his father especially, whose attachment towards the lad was curious too to witness.[9]

In time, "the beautiful mother vision" faded and "fear, doubt and resistance sprang up, in the boy's own bosom!"[10] While Rebecca "was pushing onwards to what they call a position in society"[11] her son remained neglected and forgotten as far as his mother was concerned. The bitterness of the picture is softened by Thackeray's presentation of the senior Rawdon Crawley as a father. For his son he had

> a great, secret tenderness...He felt somehow ashamed of this paternal softness, and hid it from his wife—only indulging in it when alone with the boy.[12]

> It estranged Rawdon from his wife more than he knew or acknowledged to himself.[13]

It wouldn't be impossible to argue Thackeray's deep affection for the young from the fact in his story that he allowed neither of the youths pictured,

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[8] Ibid., p. 380.

[9] Ibid., p. 446.

[10] Ibid., p. 447.

[11] Ibid., p. 448.

[12] Ibid., p. 380.

[13] Ibid., p. 523.

Rawdon Crawley nor George Osborne, to grow up under adverse conditions. The domestic breakdown of Becky's and Rawdon's lives was the means of placing Rawdon minor under his Aunt Jane's tender motherliness, where he grew up a credit to himself. George Osborne, who was becoming an insufferable little snob under his grandfather's care, was rescued in time by the death of Mr. Osborne, and placed under the stricter and more sensible guardianship of Major William Dobbin.

Thackeray included warfare as among the follies of man reading on family life, and shows its dismal aftermath as another victimizing of the helpless. George Osborne's life was cut off in its prime; Amelia was left husbandless, and young George fatherless. And because Amelia had buried

> in the grave with him all her husband's faults and foibles, and only remembered the lover, who had married her at all sacrifices,[14]

poor Major Dobbin was kept from the reward of his tender services to Amelia for many years. Amelia could not come to the point where she could consider that the espousing of another would not be an act of unfaithfulness to George. Into Amelia's life, war had cast its first shadows when her father's speculations in the stock market had been swept down with the victories of Napoleon. Thackeray comments:

> When the eagles of Napoleon were flying...from steeple to steeple until they reached the towers of Notre Dame, I wonder whether the Imperial birds had any eye for a little corner of the parish of Bloomsbury, London, which you might have thought so quiet, that even the whirring of those mighty wings would pass unobserved there?....You too, kindly, homely flower! is the great war tempest coming to sweep you down, here, although towering under the shelter of Holborn? Yes; Napoleon is flinging his last stake, and poor little Emmy Sedley's happiness forms, somehow, part of it.[15]

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[14] Ibid., p. 462.

[15] Ibid., p. 165.

Had Mr. Sedley's fortune remained intact, Amelia would never have been forced to the depths of misery she suffered. From these pictures of sorrow and disappointments, we comprehend how Thackeray, picking his deprecating and devastating way among human follies, arrived at the conclusion that the innocent are the bitterest sufferers in the wake of man's folly. As he has developed these pictures within the domestic scene it argues well that the trend of the Victorian mind was open to an appeal directed to the concept of family life.

The Newcomes (1852-54) is not less satiric than Vanity Fair, but it is less bitter. It is strictly single in its purpose, the criticism being directly of family life. The tone of the story may be anticipated if one knows the legend of its conception as told by Thackeray in the postscript to The Newcomes:

> Two years ago, walking with my children in some pleasant fields near to Berne, in Switzerland, I strayed from them into a little wood, and coming out of it presently, told them how the story had been revealed to me somehow.[16]

The domestic companionableness of this little scene is the exact couterpart of the tone of relation between Colonel Newcome and his son, Clive. They were a pair of friends as well as father and son; Clive felt a tender admiration for his father's goodness, a loving delight in his naive opinion about men, or books, or morals; and the father took pride in the young son who was the picture of health, strength, activity, and good humor; and loved this son's sense of humor which played perpetually round his own simple philosophy. The Colonel's life was one continuous self-sacrifice in the interest of his only son, Clive. The son's career, on which so many hopes had been built

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[16]The Newcomes, Vol. II, p. 421.

was marred by failure. He loved his cousin Ethel Newcome, but the ambitions of her family came between them. He made a wretched marriage. He was not successful as an artist. Life had been made too easy for Clive. His character was strong but faulty and should have been put to severer tests in his youth. As the narrator, Mr. Pendennis says,

> I am thinking of the love of Clive Newcome's father for him...how the old man lay awake, and devised kindnesses, and gave his all for the love of his son, and the young man took, and spent, and made merry.[17]

Thackeray tells his story as to directly implicate the loving egoism of parental ministrations. Throughout the narrative, he sketches Colonel Newcome indulging in his loving planning for Clive. The time of his separation from his young son, while in India, was spent anticipating Clive's future.

When Clive has had five or six years at school--

that was his theme--

> he will be a fine scholar, and have at least as much classical learning as a gentleman in the world need possess. Then I will go to England, and we will pass three or four years together, in which he will learn to be intimate with me, and, I hope, to like me.

There is no conscious possessiveness in these last words. There is rather an humility; as there always was in the Colonel's wishes. It is only as the progression of the passing events reveals the wounded pride of the father that Thackeray makes evident the unconscious, egoism lying within the Colonel's heart. This is brought out as the Colonel ruminates further,

> .....I will make myself his companion, and pretend to no superiority; for indeed isn't he my superior? Of course he is with his advantages...

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[17] The Newcomes, Vol. I, p. 198.

In the following we feel the egoism distinctly

> By the time he is eighteen, he will be able to choose his profession. He can go into the army, and emulate the glorious man after whom I named him; or, if he prefers the church, or the law, they are open to him.

He closes his musings with this totally unconscious tribute to himself, which, no doubt, is the universal dream of all parents:

> I can come back to India for a few years, and return by the time he has a wife and a home for his old father; or if I die, I shall have done the best for him, and my boy will be left with the best education, a tolerable small fortune and the blessing of his old father.[18]

These were the Colonel's dreams. One by one they were shattered, not by any malignity of fate, but just by the natural order of life that comes through the disparity of viewpoint between youth and age. The dreams were partially fulfilled: the father came home; father and son travelled. In the account of their travels, Thackeray sketches this delightfully illuminating scene: As Clive and his father went from town to town, the Colonel

> with old fashioned cordiality would bid the landlord drink a glass of his own liquor, and seldom failed to say to him, "This is my son, sir; we are travelling together to see the country."[19]

Their affectionate intimacy grew as Clive attained to young manhood. But with the passing of the months the father felt himself more and more alone. Mr. Clive gave entertainments to his fellow-students to which he invited his father now and then,

> But the good gentleman did not frequent the parties of the juniors. He saw that his presence rather silenced the young men; and left them to themselves.....Many a time he heard the young fellows' steps tramping

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[18] Ibid., p. 58.

[19] Ibid., p. 161.

by his bedchamber door, as he lay wakeful within, happy to think his son was happy.[20]

In time the father felt the gulf that was growing up between him and Clive. The young man had occupations, ideas, associates, in whom the elder could take no interest. As Colonel Newcome realized what vain egotistical hopes he used to form about the boy, "how in the happy future, Clive was to be always at his side; how they were to read, work, play, think, be merry together,"[21] a sense of the sickening and humiliating reality came over him.

Thackeray does not condemn Clive's careless cruelty. He writes,

> We must not quarrel with Clive and Clive's friends, because they could not joke and be free in the presence of the worthy gentleman.....A company of old comrades shall be merry and laughing together, and the entrance of a single youngster will stop conversation; and if men of middle age feel this restraint with our opinions, the young ones surely have a right to be silent before their elders.

He carries his thought further in a direct application to parents:

> There is scarce any parent, however friendly or tender with his children, but must feel sometimes that they have thoughts which are not his or hers; and wishes and secrets quite beyond the parental control; and, as people are vain long after they are fathers, ay, or grandfathers, and not seldom fancy that mere personal desire of domination is overwhelming anxiety and love for their family, no doubt that common outcry against thankless children might often be shown to prove, not that the son is disobedient but the father too exacting.

He speaks in a like strain on mothers and confidences of their daughters, and adds:

> ....nor can there be a wholesome task for the elders, as our young subjects grow up, naturally demanding liberty and citizens rights, than for us gracefully to abdicate our sovereign pretensions and claims of absolute control.

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[20] Ibid., p. 184.

[21] Ibid., p. 215.

He follows this with a warning to those parents whose "very virtues and purity of their lives" demand love and obedience as a tribute and fail to realize the superiority of "the willing offering of love and freedom."[22] This thought of Thackeray's is identical with that of Samuel Butler, expressed a little later. Thackeray's characters do not revolt against parental hypocrisy, however. Changing conventions had not as yet strengthened the young with the independence of thought and action that time gave to Ernest Pontifex. Thackeray was overcoming a domestic handicap in a manner far less destructive to the family institution than was Butler's method of revolt. In order to bring about a more perfect domestic institution, Thackeray did not attempt to destroy family and religion; he made evident their existing insincerities and weaknesses, but he instigated no revolt as did Butler.

The pernicious effect of such indulgence as the Colonel was guilty of with his son, is seen in the change in the character of Clive. From a frank, generous, kind-hearted person, pampering brought out a trait of arrogance, a well-satisfied feeling with himself. Clive himself lamented in his late life that he had not been subjected to a more leveling regime in his youth. From his enumeration of what he thought might have been salutary experiences for himself, we may conclude that these were the media through which Thackeray would put the developing boy. First, Clive

> laments that he was withdrawn from school too early, where a couple of years further course of thrashings from his tyrant would have done him good;

Second,

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[22] Ibid., pp. 212,213.

> he laments that he was not sent to college, where, if a young man receives no other discipline at least he acquires that of meeting with his equals in society, and of assuredly finding his betters.[23]

Colonel Newcome was able to adjust his viewpoint to a sympathetic acknowledgment of that of a younger generation than himself. He gave up his dream of travelling and studying with Clive saying, "I fancy now a lad is not the better for being always tied to his parents' apron-string."[24] Along with his change of viewpoint was his recognition of the changes taking place in the attitude between children and parents. He writes in a letter to Clive,

> Your letters, my dearest Clive, have been the greatest comfort to me. I seem to hear you as I read them. I can't but think that this, the modern and natural style, is a great progress upon the old-fashioned manner of my day when we used to begin to our father, "Honoured Father" or even "Honoured Sir", some precisions used to write still.....though I suspect parents were no more honoured in those days than nowadays. I know one who had rather be trusted than honoured; and you may call me what you please, so as you do that.[25]

There is another character in the story who also came to a realization of the changing social order and its effects on family life. Lady Kew, the domineering old grandmother of the story, admitted only after the defeat of her will by her grandson and her granddaughter that to the younger generation must be given recognition of their right to rule their own lives. She says to her granddaughter,

> Stay a little, Ethel,—I am older than your father, and you owe me a little obedience, that is, if children do owe any obedience to their parents nowadays. I don't know,

she adds in a puzzled manner, she who was never hesitant,

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[23] Ibid., p. 189.

[24] Ibid., p. 274.

[25] The Newcomes, Vol. II, p. 9.

> I am an old woman—the world perhaps has changed since my time; and it is you who ought to command, I dare say, and we to follow. Perhaps I have been wrong all through life, and in trying to teach my children to do as I was made to do. God knows I have had very little comfort from them; whether they did or whether they didn't.[26]

Lady Kew's indefatigable efforts to bring about the marriage of her granddaughter Ethel and the young Lord Kew is the keynote to Thackeray's introduction of the marriage of convenience theme. Thackeray is at his bitterest when writing on this subject. He likens it to the sacrifices that take place in the Indian Brahmen's home when the Brahmin dies and his widow is being pushed on the funeral pile in a last sacrifice. But "amongst us" Thackeray says:

> ....this ceremony is so stale and common that, to be sure there is no need to describe its rites, and as women sell themselves for what you call an establishment everyday, to the applause of themselves, their parents, and the world, why on earth should a man ape at originality, and pretend to pity them? Never mind about the lies at the altar, the blasphemy against the godlike name of love, the sordid surrender, the smiling dishonour. What the deuce does a <u>marriage de convenance</u> mean but all this, and are not such sober Hymeneal torches more satisfactory often than the most brilliant love-matches that ever flamed and burnt out? Of course, let us not weep when everybody else is laughing; .... Her ladyship's sacrifice is performed, and the less said about it the better.[27]

Thackeray's greatest indictment of the marriage of convenience in <u>The Newcomes</u> is not directed against Lady Kew's manoeuvrings. Barnes Newcome's marriage with Lady Clara Pulleyn is the basis for his condemnation of society's tolerant attitude, and for its injustice to those to whom the practice brings deterioration. The description of the marriage of Barnes and Lady Clara could be that of any forced marriage:

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[26] <u>The Newcomes</u>, Vol. I, p. 420.

[27] <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 301, 302.

> A bad, selfish husband had married a woman for her rank; a weak, thoughtless girl had been sold to a man for his money; and the union which might have ended in a comfortable indifference, had taken an ill turn and resulted in misery, cruelty, fierce mutual recriminations, bitter tears shed in private, husband's curses and maledictions, and open scenes of wrath and violence.[28]

Thackeray denounces those

> worthy mammas of families who close their minds to the fact that such marriages make bad wives; that marriages begun in indifference make homes unhappy; and that women forget the oaths which they have been made to swear.[29]

The author speaks of the hypocrisy that is reared by tyranny; the dissimilitude of the smiling face to society; and that which follows, the hypocrisy of the moral life; and finally of the miscarriage of justice and public opinion in those cases that come before the courts. There is no place for the divorced woman in society,

> the very man who loves her,

Thackeray writes,

> and gives her asylum, pities and deplore her....People, as criminal but undiscovered make room for her, as if her touch were pollution...all the sisterhood of friendship is cut off from her; her children do not know her.[30]

Of the former husband's attitude the author asks:

> If her once-husband thinks upon the unhappy young creature whom his cruelty drove from him, does his conscience affect his sleep at night?

and Thackeray satirically responds with another question,

> Why should Sir Barnes Newcome's conscience be more squeamish than his country's which has put money in his pocket for having trampled on the

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[28] The Newcomes, Vol. II, p. 213.

[29] Ibid., p. 188.

[30] Ibid., p. 224.

poor weak young thing, and scorned her, and driven her to ruin?

He then puts the question to society,

> When the whole of the accounts of that wretched bankruptcy are brought up for final Audit, which of the unhappy partners shall be shown to be more guilty?

Thackeray's final accusation is directed to the intimates of the couple in the persons of the clergy who sanction such unions by performing the ceremony, the parents who pressed the marriage, the witnesses who gave their signatures to the authenticity of the rites, the guests who "ate the wedding breakfast and applauded the bridegroom's speech."[31] Thackeray's denunciation of the marriage of convenience is the most direct and ruthless of any in the fiction covered by this study. He examined the subject from every angle and placed the social consequences impartially. His forceful attack is in contrast to Jane Austen's subtle remonstrance of an evil she was equally as conscious of. As society was becoming less bound by convention, the language of the fictionists was becoming more open and their manner more courageous. In a comparison of the artisticness of the older and newer methods of approach, Jane Austen's novels surpass those of Thackeray. The tendency to place purpose before art was being definitely felt.

The marriage of Clive and Rosey presents another matrimonial problem, namely, the dominance of the mother-in-law. To Thackeray, it was considered an evil as pernicious in its effect upon family life as the marriage of convenience. Clive's and Rosey's marriage, to begin with, was not contracted through love, at least on Clive's part. It had been made up by old people,

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[31] Ibid., pp. 225, 226.

the Colonel and Rosey's uncle. Clive had only yielded out of good-nature and obedience, and might one add, pique? Of this marriage the story tells us

> To please the best father in the world; the kindest old friend who endowed his niece with the best part of his savings; to settle that question about marriage and have an end of it,--Clive Newcome had taken a pretty and fond young girl, who respected and admired him beyond all men, and who heartily desired to make him happy.

But Clive was not as honest in his motive. Thackeray ironically adds of him,

> One great passion he had had and closed the account of it; a worldly ambitious girl--how foolishly worshipped and passionately beloved no matter--had played with him for years, had flung him away when a dissolute suitor with a great fortune and title had offered himself. Was he to whine and despair because a jilt had fooled him? He had too much pride and courage for any such submission; he would accept the lot in life which was offered to him, no undesirable one surely; he would fulfil the wish of his father's heart, and cheer his declining years. In this way the marriage was brought about.[32]

If the young couple had been left alone to solve their marital difficulties perhaps they would have avoided disaster. Clive's character was inherently strong and noble enough to have been able to adjust itself to life, and Rosey, the weak and easily influenced type, could have been moulded into agreeable lines. It was a hazardous situation, and at its best, it would have had to weather many difficulties without the added one of a domineering mother-in-law. Mrs. Mackenzie, privately known as the "Campaigner","ruled over the Clive Newcome family and added to all their distresses by her intolerable presence and tyranny."[33] Clive, speaking of his home life to his friend Pendennis says,

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[32] Ibid., pp. 262, 263.

[33] Ibid., p. 350.

> "By Jove, Pen, I laugh when some of my friends congratualte me on my good fortune! I am not quite the father of my own child, nor the husband of my own wife, nor even the master of my own easel. I am managed for, don't you see! boarded, lodged, and done for. And here is the man they call happy."[34]

In Thackeray's opinion, the dominance of the family by one outside the intimate circle of parents and children is tragical. Besides Mrs. Mackenzie whose caustic tongue left her an unchallenged field, The Newcomes has another representative of this domestic evil in the case of Lady Kew, the domineering grandmother whose source of power lay in her wealth. Thackeray's effectiveness in the use of the theme is due to its application in two distinct threads of the story, in a manner that was not repetitious. The trouble these interfering personnages caused in the family of Ethel Newcome and in the case of Clive, is the most convincing argument Thackeray could present for the position he takes.

Thackeray did not neglect to leave with the reader his idea of a marriage in which one could anticipate the greatest fulfilment of family life. He presents it in the contrasting opinions of Ethel Newcome and Laura Pendennis. So much more direct attention is given to Ethel Newcome's meditation on the subject, that the reader is in danger of accepting her opinions as being those that Thackeray desired. However, the author counteracts this impression by introducing, as a minor but ever recurring undertone, the love marriage of Arthur Pendennis and Laura. It offsets the impression that Thackeray accepted marriage based as Ethel Newcome was about to do, on "no great degree of attachment" other than

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[34] Ibid., p. 319.

the common cement, warm friendship and thorough esteem and confidence, and with them Ethel considered these qualities

> safe properties invested in the prudent marriage stock, multiplying and bearing an increasing value with every year.[35]

The interjection of Laura's opposite opinions, however, occurs frequently enough to influence the reader in the belief that Thackeray's ideal marriage was one that was based on love. For example we read

> Against all marriages of interest this sentimental Laura never failed to utter indignant protests;.....She would apostrophise her unconscious young ones and inform those innocent babies that they should never be made to marry except for love, never----[36]

Clive Newcome's young son, "Boy" provides a background for Thackeray's attitude on religious training of children by their parents. From the manner in which Thackeray approaches the subject, one feels in the author a deep religious sense, sincere and balanced in practice. The simple night prayers of Boy, heard by his father and his grandfather, joined the three generations in a spiritual bond as important as any within the family circle. The reader feels the approval of the writer in the sincerity of Boy's recital of the "Our Father" and in the simple little prayer that God would bless "all those that loved him".[37] In other instances in the story, Thackeray attacks the extremes to which religious training of children is often carried. His interpretation of the character of Lady Walham, Lord Kew's mother, " a woman perfectly pure in her life and intentions", is as an extremist in religious upbringing. Such, he condemns. In introducing Lady Walham, he refers to

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[35] The Newcomes, Vol. I, p. 407.

[36] The Newcomes, Vol. II, p. 316.

[37] Ibid., p. 412.

her as one above this world, and rather ironically remarks that characters as hers, scarcely belong in the province of the novelist. But, on the effect of the influence these narrowly religious mothers exert upon their children, Thackeray has very decided ideas. Of Lord Kew's "career of pleasure, of idleness, of crime we might call it" Thackeray writes, and adds parenthetically, "(but that the chronicler of worldly matters had best be chary of applying hard names to acts which young men are doing in the world every day)[38] certainly belied the training of Lord Kew's youth. The author offers as a most probable reason,

> the precautions which she (Lady Walham) had used in the lad's early days, the tutors and directors she had set about him, the religious studies and practices to which she would have subjected him, had served only to vex and weary the young pupil, and to drive his high spirit into revolt[39]

Lady Walham and her type would be the last to be convinced that they might be doing harm. It was only when Lord Kew lay dangerously ill that his mother was able to comprehend her son's side of the argument, and to feel that her own course was wrong. She was discussing with Lord Kew the imminent death of Sir Brian Newcome. She expressed the thought that she felt from his mode of life, Sir Brian must be unprepared to die. Lord Kew came to Sir Brian's defense by saying he thought the latter had been bred very strictly "perhaps too strictly as a young man, by a very tyrannical mother". He went on to say that Sir Brian's older brother, Colonel New come, whom Lord Kew thought was "the most honest and good old gentleman he had ever met" had been driven into rebellion and all sorts of wild courses in his

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[38] The Newcomes, Vol. I, p. 404.

[39] Ibid., p. 424.

youth as a result of his training. "Sir Brian," he added,

> "goes to church every Sunday; has prayers in the family every day. I'm sure he has led a hundred times better life than I have."

Lord Kews concludes his remarks by directly criticising his mother,

> "I often have thought, mother, that though our side was wrong, yours could not be altogether right, because,"

and he naively adds,

> "I remember how my tutor, and Mr. Bonner, and Dr. Land, when they used to come down to us at Kewbury, used to make themselves so unhappy about other people."[40]

In the introductory part of the story, Thackeray describes the Newcome family and writes of the "tyrannical mother" that Lord Kew speaks about. He writes of her teaching her sons hymns very soon after they could speak;

> hymns appropriate to their tender age, pointing out to them the inevitable warning and description of the punishment of little sinners.[41]

From these incidents in The Newcomes it is possible to assume that Thackeray believed in training children in religious practices, but that suitability and moderation should be serious considerations; and that love and not fear should be the basis of children's religious attitude. The Newcomes and Vanity Fair expose the weaknesses and pernicious practices of the family circle most cogently. They are stories in which the author has devoted himself to reveal society to itself for its own instruction. Written on the themes of early nineteenth century upper middle class society, their subjects cover, for the most part, the extremes to which people would go to gain social recognition. Social barriers were menacing agents to sane living.

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[40] Ibid., p. 411.

[41] Ibid., p. 18.

It is interesting to note that both Bulwer-Lytton and Meredith wrote their novels on education from the viewpoint of the effect of family environment. As has been seen, Bulwer-Lytton believed that family influence is one of the most potent factors in the fullest education of youth. Meredith, on the other hand, thought that any external influence, unless working freely in cooperation with natural inclinations, would frustrate self-development. It was his belief that the building of moral stature could not be planned or mechanized; that there must be a reasonable liberty of action. The Ordeal of Richard Feveral (1859) is his story of an education that miscarried because it ignored this element of freedom. Meredith's interest in education grew out of his own problem in the bringing up of his son. While he was writing The Ordeal of Richard Feveral, his home relations were such as to make him apprehensive of their effect upon his only child. Meredith's first marriage had terminated in the unfaithfulness of his wife. He had been unable to forgive her, although she had attempted a reconciliation. What this might mean in poisoning the life of his son to whom he had transferred the love he could no longer give to the mother, filled Meredith with foreboding. He sought relief from this strenuous tension in the writing of a story wherein he attempted his own exoneration by picturing the folly another husband and father might attempt, under similar circumstances.

The first part of The Ordeal of Richard Feveral is a counterpart of Meredith's married life. It begins by picturing the disastrous influence on Sir Austin Feveral of his wife's desertion, and as with Meredith, Sir Austin's inability to forgive. The philosophy Sir Austin's bitterness taught him, was to be applied to his young son, Richard, through a system

of education. The system was to put nature and virtue in the foreground, but at the same time was "to hedge the Youth from corruptness" and eventually, in him, would be seen "something approaching to a perfect Man....after a receipt, the Baronet trusted, of his own likeness."[42] Consistently with his time, Meredith evolved the System on scientific lines. Sir Austin charted his son's life as to phases of growth; within each was determined what contacts should be made, what life experiences should be met. But always was kept in mind the fact, that as Sir Austin's great ordeal came through love and marriage, Richard was to be kept in ignorance of such until his character had been made impervious to the corruption of the world. Then, the System was to culminate in Richard's proper marriage. In other words, Sir Austin attempted to prohibit and control natural development. "The System grew as the boy grew."[43] and inevitably brought disaster. Science, as it frequently happens, when interfering with nature, offered destruction rather than growth to Richard. Built on the false philosophy of the inhibition of natural outlet, the System left Richard unable to cope with life when he met it. The tragedy of his life came not through his wife's unfaithfulness but his own. The high, natural excellence of this youth's nature was thwarted by the inadequacy of his training.

Meredith delineates in a interesting story the points that he feels are the crucial ones in character building; the procedures wherein parents are most apt to err; and the facts of life that are most precious. He takes the

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[42] George Meredith, The Ordeal of Richard Feveral, pp. 11, 12.

[43] Ibid., p. 23.

attitude throughout the story of an adverse critic of Sir Feveral's System, making apparent its mistakes and giving his constructive criticism in the voiced opposition of the minor characters. The fallacy of the System was apparent as early as Richard's fourteenth birthday, could Sir Austin have but seen it. The family doctor pleaded against the isolation imposed on Richard. "

> I like boys to be boys and mix together. At a school there are two extremes: good boys, and the reverse. Your son does not see that distinction here. He is a heathen as to right and wrong. Good from instinct —not from principle: a creature of impulse.[44]

And as natural with a boy, but not according to the System, Richard's impulses often led him into trouble. The father prayed nightly with fervor and humbleness to God but often "a sensation of infinite melancholy overcame him" for Richard contacted evil in some mysterious way." "Adrian", (uncle of Richard) "characterized the System well in saying that Sir Austin wished to be Providence to his son."[45] Sir Austin's belief in the efficacy of prayer was not meant as a gesture of irony on the part of the author. From Meredith's Letters it is apparent that he particularly felt the folly of bringing up young people without religion and hence for Richard the example of a father who turned to prayer in time of need was one of the imperative features of his thesis. For the most part, during Richard's youth, Sir Austin was able to keep in close harmony with his son. Particularly noticeable was this fact after some ordeal through which Richard had passed successfully, as, for instance, after the escapade of the burning Farmer Blaize hayrick.

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[44] Ibid., p. 39.

[45] Ibid., p. 68.

Richard's father and he "were heart in heart. The boy's mind was opening and turned to his father affectionately, reverently." Meredith brings out here his understanding of the adolescent period that has reached its "malleable moment." "At this period," he says

> when the young savage grows into higher influences, the faculty of worship is foremost in him....and all who bring up youth by a System and watch it, know that it is the malleable moment. Boys under supervision take the impress that is given them.

Therefore Sir Austin surrounded Richard with

> example, that should be a kind of to germinate in him the love of every form of nobleness[46]

and made equal use of every illustration that might disgust his son. Sir Austin did not even spare his brother, inebriating Hippias, to exhibit to Richard the woeful retribution nature wreaked upon a life of indulgences.

As long as Richard retained confidence in his father, the System appeared successful. The first indication of failure came in the shattering of Richard's trust. This was occasioned by the father's discovery that his son was writing poetry, a fact, which to Sir Austin, was indicative of weakness in a Feveral. Without explanation, Sir Austin requested Richard to burn his poems "that it would give him pleasure to see those same precocious, utterly valueless scribblings among the cinders." To this inexplicable request, Richard "protested not. Enough that it could be wished." Meredith is quite indignant here in his plea for the adolescent boy.

> For a youth in his Blossoming Season who fancies himself a poet, to be requested to destroy his first-born, without a reason (though to pretend a reason cogent enough to justify the request were a mockery) is

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[46] Ibid., p. 122.

a piece of abhorent despotism.

He points out the inevitable catastrophe that follows such dogmatic treatment of youth: the loss of "all true confidence between Father and Son."[47] In the case of Richard its results were far-reaching. The prohibition of this method of innocent and harmless release of emotions that he was incapable of understanding, cut off Richard from an outlet that he could ill affor d to lose. When a little later, Richard saw his father kiss a woman's hand--Lady Bandish's--the relation of the sexes burst on him, and he was totally unprepared for it.

The nonsense that was in the youth might have poured harmless out, writes the author,

> had he not sworn he would never wite again; but Sir Austin had shut that safety valve.

And Meredith ironically writes that after months of troublesome "wondering and sighing" over he knew not what Richard finally had the answer. "He had the key now. His own father had given it to him."[48] Sir Austin, himself, was the greatest handicap to the success of the System. "Unhappily, the baronet, by some fatality never could see when he was winning the battle."[49] His mind was so encompassed by theories that he was blinded to actualities and was constantly, by some inadvertant stroke, destroying what his System was attempting to build. Through ridicule he sought to destroy Richard's regard for Lucy Desborough and succeeded only in utterly destroying the remaining strand of Richard's trust in him.

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[47] Ibid., pp. 131, 132.

[48] Ibid., pp. 142, 143.

[49] Ibid., p. 226.

No matter how unsympathetic one is with Sir Austin's arbitrary plan for Richard, it cannot be denied that he was actuated by the sincerest motives in what he attempted to do for his son. His error lay in the extreme egoism of his paternity. His egoism, however, was vulnerable. He admitted his defeats, at least to himself and attempted to circumscribe them by adopting methods pretty commonly employed by parents. Where he could not get his way through his authority, he was not incapable of a personal appeal.

"You know my love for you, my son,"

he said on one occasion to Richard,

> "The extent of it you cannot know; but you must know that it is something very deep and--I do not wish to speak of it--but a father must sometimes petition for gratitude, since the only true expression of it is his son's moral good."[50]

And again, at the time when he learned that Richard was in love with some one not of his choosing, Sir Austin's reaction was typically human,

> He tried hard to feel infallible, as a man with a System should feel; and because he could not do so.....he descended to entertain a personal antagonism to the young woman who had stepped in between his Experiment, and success.[51]

He took the common ground of fathers, and demanded

> Why was he not justified in doing all that lay in his power to prevent his son from casting himself away upon the first creature with a pretty face he encountered?

He did his utmost to prevent the marriage of Richard and Lucy but he was defeated. When forced to admit failure, his words showed a pseudo-stoicism

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[50] Ibid., p. 225.

[51] Ibid., p. 239.

that covered hurt pride: "You see--it is useless to base any System on a human being."[52] During all his twenty years of busy planning and determining he had overlooked the fact that Richard was but a human being, not the creation of his pride and joy. He had experimented with humanity, in the person of his son, thinking he had experimented with a System for humanity. In the first agony of his defeat, his heart was filled with bitterness toward Richard and running true to paternal form, he sententiously remarked "He" (Richard) "is become a man, as a man he must reap his own sowing."[53]

Sir Austin is very human in his defeat. Later, when he prescribed a temporary separation of Richard and his bride, Mrs. Berry, Richard's old nurse, reads his character accurately when she says

> Let that sweet young couple come together, and be wholesome in spite of him (Sir Austin), I say; and then give him time to come round, he'll come round just like a woman, and give 'em his blessing.[54]

From the words of Mrs. Berry in her capacity of champion of the young couple, we learn much of Meredith's reaction to matrimony. Neither of his own marriages was a happy one. His first had been a torture, and in the second, his genius had separated him from his wife in a manner that was most trying to both. Yet, in each case, he had kept, with examplary strictness, to his marriage vow. The old nurse voiced Meredith's attitude. She was against the separation of married couples for whatever reason, misunderstandings arise, harmony is disrupted, temptation is easily succumbed to. "Them that is

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[52] Ibid., p. 388.

[53] Ibid., p. 396.

[54] Ibid., p. 473.

joined it's their salvation not to separate" she says. Later she remarks, "I'll say, once married--married for life!" Another belief of Meredith's that she expressed is, that much misery can be avoided if marriage is not entered into too early in life.

"I'm for holding back young people,"

she says to Richard,

> "so that they know their minds, howsomever they rattles about their arts. I ain't a speeder of matrimony, and good's my reason! but where it's been done--where they're lawfully joined, and their bodies made one, I do say this, to put division between em then, it's to make wanderin' comets of 'em--creatures without a objeck, and no soul can say what they're good for but to rush about!"[55]

The two marriages that occur in The Ordeal terminated unhappily. In their tragic endings, Meredith's indictment of the scheming fathers and mothers of the century finds expression. In each, nature had been thwarted through the interference and domination of parental authority. Sir Austin's idea of a suitable wife for his son was one who had no taint in her physical inheritance and was of stauch health. Before he commenced his campaign for a daughter-in-law, he went about inquiring into the family histories of the socially eligible. Here Meredith sketches a ridiculous picture of Mrs. Caroline Grandison's "System of Gymnastics with her eight daughters."[56] He brings in his sense of the comic by having Sir Austin select one of the eight of this most adroitly scheming mother, as a likely candidate for his daughter-in-law. Neither Sir Austin nor Mrs. Grandison's Systems succeeded for both "employed Science" whereas their offspring "employed instinct".[57]

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[55] Ibid., p. 466.

[56] Ibid., pp. 181-192.

[57] Ibid., p. 186.

The Grandison girls, we are led to understand, followed their own inclinations and Richard took things into his hands and married the girl of his choice. Sir Austin's separation of Lucy and Richard, as a sort of probationary measure to strengthen them for what ordeals their union might bring, threw Richard into a manner of living that Sir Austin's rigid withholding of Richard from corrupting contacts, had ill-prepared him to meet. Richard's remorse over his unfaithfulness to Lucy forced him to flee to Germany. Before a reconciliation could take place, Lucy's untimely death terminated what should have been the beginning of two happy lives.

Equally tragic is the death of Richard's cousin Clare, whose mother managed the settling of her daughter in marriage. The Ordeal states that many had designs on the young heir of Sir Austin Feveral. They came to Raynham, bringing their "highly polished specimen of market-ware"[58] but none was quite so calculating as Mrs. Doria Forey for her daughter, Clare. Clare's forced marriage with an old friend of her mother's when Mrs. Forey's scheming for Richard went astray, led to the suicide of Clare. Combined in Clare were the new urgings of her generation for individuality along with all the inhibitions of personality of the older generation.

> Clare had always been blindly obedient to her mother....and her mother accepted in this blind obedience the text of her entire character.

But Meredith adds,

> It is difficult for those who think very earnestly for their children to know when their children are thinking on their own account. The exercise of their own volition we construe as revolt.

As a parent, he adds,

> Our love does not like to be invalided and deposed from it command,

and warns that

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[58] Ibid., p. 59.

> excess of obedience is, to one who manages most exquisitely, as bad as insurrection.[59]

There is a peculiarity in Meredith's stand on parental domination not perceptible in Samuel Butler when he wrote on the same theme. Meredith found excuses for the parent. Butler was inexorable. Meredith was more of his time: his judgment was swayed by sentimentality. Butler anticipated the cold detachment of the next century. Meredith in Mrs. Forey's case petitioned his readers

> to remember that she saw years of self-denial, years of a ripening scheme rendered fruitless in a minute, and by the System which had almost reduced her to the condition of constitutional hypocrite. She felt an agony of pity for her daughter over the loss of Richard, and although she felt it that she might the more warrantably pity herself --she had enough of bitterness to brood over, and some excuse for self-pity.[60]

Butler would not concede this.

While Meredith condemns the interfering mother, he does not neglect to include in his story the filial regard of a son for his mother. As far as the story is concerned, Meredith could very well have omitted any further reference to Richard's mother than that in the first part of the book. It does not seem to have been his intention, however, to write a story of the education of a son and omit one of its most important factors. Richard was raised motherless and in ignorance of all facts concerning his mother but the one that she still existed. It took sorrow and the maturity of young manhood to bring to life the latent spark of his filial regard. When his marriage

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[59] Ibid., p. 341

[60] Ibid., p. 383.

had severed him from his father "Richard's heart spoke for her."[61] From Mrs. Doria he learnt his mother's history.

> Disgrace of this kind is always present to a son, and, educated as he had been, these tidings were a vivid fire in his brain.[62]

He found his mother and provided for her. That practically ends the episode, and with Meredith, the reader leaves it with this thought: "As to the justice of the act let us say nothing."[63] The necessity for this episode to the art of the story is negligible, although it did provide a legitimate excuse for Richard remaining away from Lucy while he searched for his mother. The author could have just as well provided some other expedient. On the other hand, if Meredith was writing this story from his own life, as some of his biographers believe[64] he could not omit it. It was this hovering fear of how his own son would react to his mother and father when he understood the significance of their separation, that was causing Meredith so much mental anguish at this time.

The Ordeal of Richard Feverel is not Meredith's only contribution to the literature of domestic life. He was greatly interested in the status of women and wrote several novels on different aspects of this theme. He was writing at a time when women were struggling to find a place for themselves in a changing world in which all the taboos were pulling them back, while all the necessities were forcing them forward. In a world rapidly becoming professionalized, he saw that women lagged behind in an individual workshop, the home, without status or standards of work of remuneration. Public opin-

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[61] Ibid., p. 459.

[62] Ibid., p. 459.

[63] Ibid., p. 459.

[64] Robert E. Sencourt, The Life of George Meredith, p. 65.

ion still limited women to sex and motherhood, surrounding them with restrictions marked by romantic attitudes. He saw the pernicious effect of women's isolation from social effort and social criticism; saw women dependent and servile, praised for being so, outlawed if they rebelled. Meredith undertook to teach that they were human beings first, that they must live in the current of social life, using it and contributing to it with the best technique available for their own and the world's improvement. He felt that the constraints put upon the aptitudes and faculties of women by traditional conventions were unjust and that the race was poorer as a result. Meredith always urged, however, that a woman's highest prerogative was motherhood, but he took an open stand against the narrow life that condemned interest in any but nursery affairs. Domestic life was taken very seriously in those days. The creation of home was an all-absorbing work of those that had them. It was not the unusual family that could count ten or twelve children. In consequence of which, there was a prevalence of "nursery prattle" in the conversation of women, such as we have noted in Jane Austen's mothers. In Rhoda Fleming (1865), Meredith takes exception to this limited scope of a woman's interest. In the novel, Edward Blancove writes to Dahlia Fleming:

> I wish you to go on with your lessons in French. Educate yourself, and you will rise superior to these distressing complaints. I recommend you to read the newspapers daily. Buy nice picture books if the papers are too matter of fact for you. By looking eternally inward, you teach yourself to fret, and the consequence is, or will be, that you wither. No constitution can stand it. All the ladies here taken an interest in Parliamentary affairs. They can talk to men upon men's themes. It is impossible to explain to you how wearisome an everlasting nursery prattle becomes. The idea that men ought never to tire of it is founded on some queer belief that they are not mortal.[65]

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[65] Meredith, Rhoda Fleming, p. 185.

In marriage, Meredith believed that woman was not only essential to the man of nature, but with him completed and ennobled the life of mind and heart. Meredith seldom however created the sweet womanly type of Lucy Desborough. Generally, his heroines were splendid beautiful women, physically and mentally active with little inclination toward domesticity and self-effacement. Clara Middleton in The Egoist (1879) performed the unprecedented act, according to the Victorian moral code, of breaking her engagement to Sir Willoughby Patterne rather than relinquish her individuality. "My mind is my own, married or not,"[66] she reasoned to herself, but according to Sir Willoughby, "the ideal of conduct for women is to subject their minds to the part of an accompaniment."[67] Clara could not vision herself gradually receding into the background of her husband's life. Here in The Egoist, Meredith for the first time expresses his rooted mistrust of male egoism with its attendant consequence of feminine subjugation, and rarely in his later books did he wander far from these conjoined themes. The Egoist is a piercing satire on the egoism that was so pronounced a characteristic of the nineteenth century. Sir Willoughby Patterne, a Victorian in search of a wife, pitilessly reveals the satisfied complaisance of his sex and of his epoch, pursuing the purity, beauty, and devotion of woman as though they were his right. His choice of Clara was purely because she was a physical complement to himself:

> Clara was young, healthy, handsome; she was therefore fitted to be his wife, the mother of his children, his companion picture. Certainly they looked well side by side. In walking with her, in drooping to her, the whole man was made conscious of the female image of himself by her ex-

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[66] Meredith, The Egoist, p. 76.

[67] Ibid., p. 100.

> quisite unlikeness. She completed him, added the softer lines wanting to his portrait before the world.[68]

Meredith was against the standard of morality that sought to establish a home upon such bases. The book centers around Clara's ordeal of selection, between her obligation to herself and to a conventional worldly standard of honor. Clara wanted from marriage what all of Meredith's heroines wanted:

> She was feminine indeed, but she wanted comradeship, a living and frank exchange of the best in both, with the deeper feelings untroubled.[69]

It was not until closer contact brought to Clara's understanding the position of mental subservience she would be forced to take as Sir Willoughby's wife, that Clara was troubled with any misgivings of her marriage. The breaking of her engagement was to her

> a question between a conventional idea of obligation and an injury to her nature. What she must decide is "Which is the more dishonourable thing to do?"[70]

Clara was willing to make a compromise between the two if she could be assured of an inner life of her own. She would then feel not dishonoured. She had for comparison in such a compromise, Veron Whitford, a tutor who lived in the home of Sir Willoughby.

> He had for years borne much that was distasteful to him, for the purpose of studying. He had lived in this place, and so must she; but he had not failed because he had a life within. She was almost imagining she might imitate him

but her intelligence rejected any such possibility. She decided that one

> better be graceless than a loathing wife; better appear inconsistent.[71]

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[68] Ibid., p. 41.

[69] Ibid., p. 57.

[70] Ibid., p. 309.

[71] Ibid., pp. 201, 202.

Meredith in Clara's desire for an identity apart from her husband's recognized the growing feeling among women for independence in thought. This is a tone not apparent in the novels of the early century. He was not, in this book, so much interested in the effect the consummation of a marriage such as Clara's and Sir Willoughby's would have in a domestic sense, as he was in how it would affect a woman's life.

Meredith's heroines are emotional enough, but are not, in the long run, at the mercy of their emotions. If they have made mistakes they have the wit to extricate themselves from situations which might prove disastrous, and to reconstruct their lives, even if to do so, they must defy conventions. But Meredith never allows a readjustment to take place through unsocial measures. In The Amazing Marriage (1895), Meredith argues that a wife is dispensed from loyalty to a man who puts his egoism in the place of conjugal rights. Carinthia Jane had a fine conception of constancy and a fine appreciation of love, but she refused a reconciliation with her husband when, after years of graceless living, he sought forgiveness. Although Meredith believed that Carinthia was justified in her refusal to become reconciled to her husband, he nevertheless compromised with his time to the extent that he made Carinthia somewhat different to the orginary young society woman of the period. He knew the narrowness of social standards well enough to anticipate adverse comment from his readers; and he himself was enough of his time to feel he must conciliate abused traditions. Here again, Meredith differed from Samuel Butler. Meredith has Carinthia Jane the daughter of parents who had defied social conventions in their marriage. They, besides, had lived voluntarily expatriates among the mountains of an Austrian province, as a gesture of protest to the

English Admirality which had done the father an injury. Carinthia Jane was raised among the simple folk of this environment, and grew up "a half wild girl," of the mountains. She was trained by her mother in the graces of refined society

> she could dance, had a voice, was a bit of a botanist, was good at English and German, and had a French governess for a couple of years.

Whereas her father trained her in the accomplishments of a sturdy boy of the outdoors--

> she could ride, swim, walk, understand the use of a walking-stick in self-defense, and could handle a sword.[72]

She lacked the artifices of society, and had a code of honour unknown to those with whom she was thrown in her young womanhood. Her early training and environment were Meredith's propitiating touch to mitigate the offense to his readers of her unprecedented conduct.

The theme of the story is comparatively simple. Lord Fleetwood treated his wife, Carinthia Jane, outrageously, and roused her to indignant coldness. When too late, he offered her his love only to have Carinthia refuse him. The tragedy of their lives grew out of Lord Fleetwood's fanatical vanity in keeping his word:

> He was renowned and unrivalled as the man of stainless honour; the one living man of his word. He had never broken it--never would. There was his distinction among the herd.[73]

In an inadvertant moment, he proposed marriage to the unsophisticated Carinthis Jane, who innocently thought him sincere and consented to the proposal

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[72] George Meredith, The Amazing Marriage, p. 81.

[73] Ibid., p. 192.

and later, kept Fleetwood to his word, although he gave an opportunity for her to withdraw. The hatred for herself Carinthia Jane engendered in him from this forced marriage, in time was subtly changed by his pride of possession into love for the wonderful woman marriage had given him. Fleetwood's transformation came slowly, being constantly held in check by "the insatiate thirst for revenge upon her who held him to his word."[74] He stooped to many questionable subterfuges to injure her, and when finally he came to repent his wrongdoing, he wasn't man enough to confess and humble himself to Carinthia. Had he done so

> in spite of horror, the task of helping to wash a black soul white would have been her compensation....She would have held hot iron to the rabid wound and come to a love of the rescued sufferer.[75]

The years of humiliation and desertion she suffered at his hands however, could be erased only with confession. Her intelligence could accept nothing less as a surety of his sincerity. Carinthia was able to look at her situation dispassionately which attitude brought from Henrietta, her sister-in-law, the remark that "she was the destruction of the idea romantic in connection with the name of marriage"[76] a remark induced by Meredith's contempt of sentimentalism. Henrietta was a representative of the type of woman Meredith was against. He was strongly for a trained intellect among women and against their traditional dependence on intuition.

Carinthia herself, in her determination to keep Fleetwood forever out of her life, was beset by "influences environing her and pressing her to

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[74] Ibid., p. 592.

[75] Ibid., p. 626.

[76] Ibid., p. 312.

submission."[77] No matter what Meredith's belief was as to the separation of husbands and wives, he was honest in presenting all the arguments in the case. He does not permit Carinthia to come to her decision without mental anxiety. Fleetwood's arguments left her cold but were put with a strength of reasonableness that had their point. Meredith's attitude toward marriage is probably embodied in the conversation between Fleetwood and Carinthia:

"You are my wife?"

"I was married to you, my lord."

"It's a tie of a kind."

"It binds me."

"Obey, you said."

"Obey it. I do."

"You consider it holy?"

"My father and my mother spoke to me of the marriage-tie. I read the service before I stood at the altar. It is holy. It is dreadful. I will be true to it."

"To your husband?"

"To his name, to his honour."

"To the vow to live with him?"

"My husband broke that fore."

"Carinthia, if he bids you, begs you to renew it? God knows what you may save me from!"

"Pray to God. Do not beg of me, my Lord. I have my brother and my little son. No more of husbands for me!"[78]

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[77] Ibid., p. 622.

[78] Ibid., p. 555.

In this dialogue, Meredith makes plain his reverence for the marriage vow. While he might be advocating a procedure of freedom unprecedented up to this time, there is not any indication that he would sanction the breaking of the marriage contract. In fact, he very distinctly makes this point several times in The Amazing Marriage: Fleetwood entered a monastery where he remained for three years, but no whisper of divorce did she (Carinthia) tolerate;[79] on another occasion when Chillon spoke to Fleetwood, disparaging the husband's claim, the brother said:

> "The bond is broken, as far as it bears on her subjection. She holds to the rite, thinks it sacred. You can be at rest as to her behaviour. In other respects, your lordship does not exist for her."[80]

And later, Carinthia assured Lady Arpington that she appreciated her duty to her marriage oath, and added, "My husband's honour is quite safe with me."[81] Meredith's thesis is that a wife has a right to act according to the judgment of her intellect, and was not to be subjected to the prevailing license among men to treat their wives as they wished; but, whatever the hardships impinging on this resolution, the marriage contract was not to be broken.

We turn now from Meredith's elaborate tolerance and glittering charity to Samuel Butler's ruthless exposure of human motive in The Way of All Flesh (1903). One approaches the study of Butler's novel reluctantly. In this analysis of family life, the author has so concentrated on the abnormalities of domestic relationships as to almost ignore natural aspects. Butler is

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[79] Ibid., p. 642.

[80] Ibid., p. 582.

[81] Ibid., p. 603.

fearless and thorough-going. Always he faced problems squarely, and said so exactly what he thought, as to be, at times, decidedly disconcerting. He examined the family institution particularly in its religious aspect, and told his own generation many unpalatable truths about the organization it was sponsoring. The views he presented in this story of a young man who discarded the teaching of his father and the church, are cruel and shocking. Cunliff believes that Butler's ideas on this subject "germinated spontaneously out of his experience."[82] Undoubtedly his attitude was very largely determined by the circumstances of his own life. This originating cause of his embitterment was a joyless upbringing in narrow evangelical surroundings, which, without question, had a certain souring effect on his temperament. From his father, a clergyman, there was little real appreciative sympathy of his sons aims and efforts and difficulties. When Butler, who was foreordained for the ministry was confronted by doubt as to questions of his religion, his father was either incapable of assisting him, or refused, for the attitude of the religion he represented was acceptance without questioning. Because he refused to accept the calling of his father, Butler was sent to New Zealand. More than anything else, perhaps, it was Butler's sojourn in New Zealand in the early formative years of his life that cut him loose from established convention. It was the memory of these years of close living with nature that helped him to detect the materialism of English thought and life and the artificialities that were its bases. His works, and his novel in particular, are the expressions of his vigorous reactions to the deceit and hypocrisies of modern life. Parents, educators, people set in authority over youth were those he chiefly attacked, because in his

[82] J. W. Cunliffe, English Literature During Last Half Century, p. 65.

experience, they were so lamentably out of touch and sympathy with the young generation. More directly, The Way of All Flesh is a merciless expose of the cruelties and ugliness which so often surround the life of children in a narrow evangelical family.

The Way of All Flesh is not a story of the sudden collapse of a family. It is a carefully developed history of a family through four generations. The collapse comes as a revolt against what life and duty had become through the amelioration of innate traits, during the successive generations. Identity of personality between parent and offspring is one of the contentions of Butler's theory of heredity. For this reason the novel begins with the fourth generation back. Accordingly, in the The Way of All Flesh, before the birth of the hero, Ernest Pontifex, we are asked to examine and consider him in the person of his ancestors. The reader is taken back three generations on his father's side and two on his mother's. The fact most apparent about Ernest's forbears and relatives is that, with the exception of two or three of their number, they were all unpleasant people. Old Mr. Pontifex, the village carpenter, who built himself an organ, is a most attractive character; so is Alethea, Ernest's aunt, with her straight-forward common sense. George Pontifex is an uninviting hypocrite only a little better than his son Theobald, the father of Ernest. Christina, Ernest's mother, was a pious, prying, suspicious visionary. The story relates how Theobald had been crushed by paternal and clerical education, and how in turn, through the same media, he had attempted to crush his son. He was not successful. The insincerity of clerical teaching as applied to family life, its cruelty under the cloaks of love and conscience, the convergent forces of heredity,

money, and education, could easily have destroyed Ernest. But he had within himself something which revolted against the practices of his parents, and directed his action into redemption for himself.

Butler begins his indictment of the hypocrisies of Christian family life by placing the responsibility for the unhappy relations between parents and children on the Church Catechism. He ironically reasons that its fault rests in the fact that it "was written too exclusively from the parental point of view" and without the help of children, and by one "clearly not young himself."[83] In it he sees the weapon whereby parents have been able to bring about so much unhappiness.

> The general impression it leaves upon the mind of the young is that their wickedness at birth was but very imperfectly wiped out at baptism, and that the mere fact of being young at all has something with it that savors more or less distinctly of the nature of sin.[84]

Taking the catechism as its cue, The Way of All Flesh elucidates the rule by which parents bring up their children: the younger generation must be brought up to respect what its fathers had respected, to love, honor, and obey its father and mother to whom it could never be sufficiently grateful for having brought it into the world, and to practice continually that difficult but truly Christian virtue of self-effacement in the presence of superior wisdom and judgment. If this brings unhappiness to children "it is astonishing how easily they can be prevented from finding it out," says Butler, "at any rate from attributing it to any other cause than their own sinfulness." If parents wish to lead a quiet life, The Way of All Flesh

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[83]Samuel Butler, The Way of All Flesh, p. 37.

[84]Ibid., p. 37.

would advise them to impress on their children their naughtiness, "much naughtier than most children;" impress on them their own inferiority,

> You carry so many more guns than they do that they cannot fight you. This is called moral influence,

the author continues,

> and it will enable you to bounce them as much as you please....Say you have their highest interests at stake whenever you are out of temper and wish to make yourself unpleasant by way of balm to your soul...You hold all the trump cards, or if you do not you can filch them; if you play them with anything like judgment you will find yourselves heads of happy, united God-fearing families.

And then Butler concludes with this cynical remark,

> True, your children will probably find out all about it some day, but not until too late to be of much service to them or inconvenience to yourself.[85]

It was Ernest's father's policy, as it had been his father's before him, to obtain dominance over his children by breaking their will, "The first signs of self-will must be carefully looked for, and plucked up by the roots at once before they had time to grow." With what assiduity this was accomplished can be imagined from the author's following remark, "Theobald picked up this numb serpent of a metaphor and cherished it in his bosom."[86] In this Theobald was abetted by Christina for if there was a conviction in Theobald's mind then, it was in Christina's too. She never remonstrated with Theobald concerning the severity of the tasks imposed upon Ernest, nor upon the beatings Theobald found necessary to inflict.

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[85]Samuel Butler, op. cit., pp. 32,33.

[86]Ibid., p. 106.

> Her version of the matter was that there had never yet been two parents so self-denying and devoted to the highest welfare of their children as Theobald and herself. For Ernest, a very great future--she was certain of it--was in store. This made severity all the more necessary, so that from the first he might have been kept pure from every taint of evil.[87]

She, too, in her way, was fond of Ernest but she permitted nothing to sway her from her loyalty to Theobald.

> She would have chopped Ernest or anyone else into little pieces of mince-meat to gratify the slightest wish of her husband, but she would not have chopped him up for anyone else.[88]

She was Theobald's indispensable partner in Ernest's rearing.

Later, and also as his father did, Theobald dominated through the power of his money. The sons of gentlemen at that time were, very often, educated beyond their abilities to earn a livelihood. Softened by the ease of their living they easily became the victims of their rich fathers. Money was the weapon the head of the family held over his offspring; with this he brought to heel his recalcitrant children. As in the case of Theobald with his father, he being "constitutionally timid", hadn't a chance against the elder Pontifex. He was helpless against the hidden threat in his father's words when he had asked to be released from joining the ministry:

> "You mistake your own mind, and are suffering from a nervous timidity which may be very natural but may not the less be pregnant with serious consequences to yourself"[89]

Again, when Theobald asks his father's help in procuring him a living, the refusal comes likewise in the form of a threat,

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[87] Ibid., p. 108.

[88] Ibid., p. 460.

[89] Ibid., p. 42.

> "Of course, I bear in mind that you are of age, and can therefore please yourself, but if you choose to claim the strict letter of the law, and act without consideration for your father's feelings, you must not be surprised if you one day find that I have claimed a liberty for myself."[90]

Thus George Pontifex forced Theobald to become a clergyman, and in like manner Theobald all but succeeded in doing the same to Ernest. Dominance was a mere matter of "will shaking", with these early fathers.

Under this rigorous and unjust regime, the Pontifex children grew up embittered young people. As children they were natural youngsters cajoling their way into the hearts of any who would take an interest in them; loving puppies and kittens and anyone who would permit them to do so. When, as they grew older, they took advantage of freedom from parental surveillance as children will, the first indication of how Ernest's brother and sister were succumbing to the harsh rule of their elders is apparent. Ernest tells us that their great days were those when their father was away from home. The air then, was freed from

> the all-reaching law, "touch not, taste not, handle not"...But the worst of it was

said Ernest

> I could never trust Joey and Charlotte; they would go a good way with me and then turn back, or even the whole way and then their consciences would compel them to tell papa and mamma. They liked running with the hare up to a certain point, but their instinct was towards the hounds.[91]

Charlotte and Joey were against Ernest then through fear, later, because "they had identified themselves with the older generation." But neither were

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[90] Ibid., p. 59.

[91] Ibid., p. 123.

they for each other. On their relation with Ernest "it was an offensive and defensive alliance but between themselves there was subdued but internecine warfare."[92] As for the worth and value and lasting effect of parental guidance and teaching that brought about this attitude, one sums up ironically and bitterly with the author, the parents' approbation of themselves:

> What more could parents do than they had done? The answer "Nothing" will rise as readily to the lips of the reader as to those of Theobald and Christina themselves.[93]

This is what the Pontifex system did to the brothers and sister. The reaction toward the parents was as equally disastrous. Ernest never cared for his father, "he could remember no felling but fear and shrinking."[94] It is doubtful if Theobald ever had any fondness for his son. Only once is there cited a case of parental pride, and that was on the occasion of Ernest's entrance at Cambridge, "and even he (Theobald) was not without a certain feeling of pride inhaving a full-blown son at the University."[95] As early as their first separation at the time Ernest entered school, at the age of twelve, Theobald recognized their lack of accord, but even then did not indulge in any self-blame:

> He is not fond of me, I'm sure he is not. He ought to be after all the trouble I have taken with him, but he is ungrateful and selfish. It is an unnatural thing for a boy not to be fond of his own father. If he was fond of me I should be fond of him, but I cannot like a son who, I am sure, dislikes me. He shrinks out of my way whenever he sees

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[92] Ibid., p. 445.

[93] Ibid., p. 152.

[94] Ibid., p. 107.

[95] Ibid., p. 235.

> me coming near him. He will not stay five minutes in the same room with me if he can help it. He is deceitful.[96]

And the only explanation Theobald could give for such unnatural conduct was that Ernest was sure to grow up extravagant!

> And his thoughts turned to Egypt and the tenth plague. It seemed to him that if the little Egyptians had been anything like Ernest, the plague must have been something very like a blessing in disguise.[97]

With his mother the case was different. It was many years before Ernest's regard for her was destroyed. She had never been able to grasp the fact that Ernest had an existence independent of hers. She demanded confidences that were not her right to have and then abused the trust that had been placed in her. This, more than any other of the hypocrisies heaped upon Ernest, nurtured the growing breach between him and his parents. Christina in her best maternal manner would invite Ernest to "a little quiet confidential talk together." Then, with Ernest firmly wedged into the corner of the sofa, "she would open her campaign." Christina lacked any intuitive delicacy and pryed and probed into whatever her suspicious nature led her. Ernest, for a long time, was unable to combat successfully these "sofa conversations"; for he believed that his mother loved him, and that he had a friend in her. But so often had she wheedled from him all she wanted to know, and afterward got him into the most horrible scrapes by telling the whole to Theobald, that he, while yet a young boy, learned to trust her no further. "She had played the domestic confidence trick upon

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[96] Ibid., pp. 146, 147.

[97] Ibid., p. 147.

him" too often. As for Christina, all this was done in the name of pious zeal.[98] Under cover of anxiety for the eternal welfare of her children, Christina was unpardonably hypocritical. In a letter Christina left for her sons in case of her death, this is very apparent. Her thought really was for Theobald's earthly happiness. She writes to the boys that their father was to find his sons "obedient, affectionate, attentive to his wishes, upright, self-denying and diligent"--Butler adds: "a goodly string forsooth of all the virtues most convenient to parents; how like maternal solicitude is this!"[99] Having parents such as these, is it to be wondered at that Ernest, still a school boy, "began to know that he had a cordial and active dislike for both of his parents"?[100] We are able to understand the forces working against the overthrow of parental authority. Butler writes, that pitted against the domestic tyranny "the watchful eye and protecting hand" that was "ever over him" to guard his comings in and goings out and to spy out all his ways, was Ernest's "tacit unconscious obstinacy."[101] In time it effected the complete break with his family. He refused to be "humbugged" into accepting the manner of living of his father and mother.

Butler in the case of Theobald, Christina and their son Ernest, has illustrated his theory of what an unfortunate expedient family life is, "I believe" he writes in a note,

> that more unhappiness comes from this source (the Family) than from any other--I mean from the attempt to make people hang together artificially

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[98] Ibid., pp. 204-206.

[99] Ibid., pp. 126-129.

[100] Ibid., p. 217.

[101] Ibid., pp. 228-230.

who would never naturally do so.[102]

In The Way of All Flesh he writes:

> It seems to me that the family is a survival of the principle which is logically embodied in the compound animal--and the compound animal is a form of life which has been found incompatible with high development. I would do with the family among mankind what nature has done with the compound animal, and confine it to the lower and less progressive races. Certainly there is no inherent love for the family system on the part of nature herself. Poll the forms of life and you will find it in a ridiculously small minority.[103]

He claims it is the system rather than the people who are at fault. That the harm that Theobald and his wife had done was through ignorance of the world and "of the things that are therein." But that at any rate "their case was hopeless." And then, advancing his theory of the prolongation of ancestry, Butler writes that it would not even do for them to be born again "unless they each be born again of a new father and a new mother and of a different line of ancestry for many generations," otherwise their "minds could never become supple enough to learn anew;" and he concludes horribly, "the only thing to do with them was to humor them and make the best of them till they died, --and be thankful when they did so."[104] With this in mind, Butler offers extenuating conditions in explanation of Theobald's and Christina's actions.

> When I thought of the little sallow-faced lad whom I had remembered years before, of the long and savage cruelty with which he had been treated in childhood--cruelty none the less real for having been due to ignorance and stupidity rather than to deliberate malice; of the atmosphere of lying and self-laudatory hallucination in which he had been

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[102] Samuel Butler, as quoted in J. F. Harris, Samuel Butler, p. 35.

[103] Samuel Butler, op. cit., p. 123.

[104] Ibid., p. 329.

> brought up; of the readiness the boy had shown to love anything that would be good enough to let him, and of how affection for his parents, unless I am much mistaken, had only died in him because it had been killed anew, again, and again, and again, each time that it had tried to spring. When I thought of all this I felt as though, if the matter had rested with me, I would have sentenced Theobald and Christina to mental suffering even more severe than that which was about to fall upon them.

And he concludes with an indictment of the Church.

> Poor people! They had tried to keep their ignorance of the world from themselves by calling it the pursuit of heavenly things, and then shutting their eyes to anything that might give them trouble. A son having been born to them they had shut his eyes also as far as was practicable. Who could blame them? They had chapter and verse for everything they had either done or left undone; there is no better thumbed precedent than that for being a clergyman and a clergyman's wife. But, on the other hand, when I thought of Theobald's own childhood, of that dreadful old George Pontifex his father, of John and Mrs. John, and of his two sisters, when again I thought of Christina's long years of hope deferred that maketh the heart sick, before she was married, of the life she must have led at Crampsford, and of the surroundings in the midst of which she and her husband both lived at Battersby, I felt as though the wonder was that misfortunes so persistent had not been followed by even graver retribution.[105]

Theobald and Christina belonged to that numerous company of religious zealots, who, from the earliest youth of their children, have so impressed on them their potential wickedness, that the children approach anything that gives them pleasure with suspicion. Ernest grew up constantly vacillating as to what was his duty and what his inclination. Even in acquiescing to his parents he was not happy. He wondered at times whether his resolution may not have sprung from a mere ignoble desire to live peaceably because harmony and love were dear to him. Life is difficult under most courses. It becomes a heart-rendering and breathless affair when, like Ernest, one

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[105] Ibid., pp. 328, 329.

has to steer a zigzag course between what one grows to know is honest, natural inclination, and what is but the "humbugging" of one's elders. And because we are even uncertain ourselves which would be the right course for him to follow, we realize by the time we come to Ernest's decision to make a complete break with his family, that Butler has written a compellingly challenging book. The inner conflict of doubt as to the purity of his own intentions pursued Ernest to the very time of his imprisonment. It was only on the desertion of his parents that he made the final break. Even then Ernest felt the necessity of squaring his conscience; thereby showing himself a true son of his father and mother, or, in Butler's words, "a prolongation of them." He broke with his parents because "he thought they hindered him in the pursuit of his truest and most lasting happiness." This, according to Butler's interpretation meant, he did it for Christ's sake for

> What is Christ if He is not this? He who takes the highest and most self-respecting view of his own welfare which it is in his power to conceive, and adheres to it in spite of conventionality, is a Christian whether he knows it and calls himself one, or whether he does not.... A man can give up father and mother for Christ's sake tolerably easily for the most part for the relations between parties will almost always have been severely strained before it comes to this. I doubt whether anyone was ever yet required to give up those to whom he was tenderly attached for a mere matter of conscience; he will have ceased to be tenderly attached to them long before he is called upon to break with them; for differences of opinion concerning any matter of vital importance spring from differences of constitution, and these will already have led to so much other disagreement that the "giving up" when it comes, is like giving up an aching but very loose and hollow tooth.[106]

Thus as Theobald and Christina did, he hid his true motive under the disguise of his Christianity. Butler ironically defends Ernest's action:

> Surely Ernest had as much right to the good luck of finding a duty made easier as he had had to the bad fortune of falling into the scrape

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[106] Ibid., pp. 355, 356.

> which had got him into prison. A man is not to be sneered at for having a trump card in his hand; he is only to be sneered at if he plays his trump card badly.[107]

Butler does not leave us much whereon to pin our faith in the integrity of the family. What we get, are but gleanings from his sword of righteousness. Beneath his irony, however, the reader often detects a tacit acknowledgment that the bond between parents and children is still something to conjure with. Theobald Pontifex's preservation of hig father's letters, for instance, held some indisputable truth. Overton says of Ernest's father,

> Remembering Theobald's general dumbness concerning his father for the many years I knew him after his father's death, there was an eloquence in the preservation of the letters and in their endorsement "Letters from my father" which seemed to have with it some faint odor of health and nature.[108]

Althea Pontifex, the aunt from whom Ernest inherited his best traits of character, chose to be buried with her grandparents

> and everyone who remembered old Mr. and Mrs. Pontifex spoke warmly of them and were pleased at their granddaughter's wishing to be laid near them.[109]

This appears to be recognition of the right sort of family integrity even in the Pontifex family. In the case of Overton, friend and narrator of the story, his childhood was spent in a home atmosphere far different from that of the Pontifex's. Butler gives us just a glimpse of it in the first part of the book. Later, we have quite a detailed picture of Overton's reactions to a visit to his early home. He returned with reluctance: he said--

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[107] Ibid., p. 355.

[108] Ibid., p. 60.

[109] Ibid., p. 184.

> I could not bear to see the house which had been my home for so many years of my life in the hands of strangers; to ring ceremoniously at a bell which I had never yet pulled except as a boy in jest; to feel that I had nothing to do with a garden in which I had in childhood gathered so many a nosegay, and which had seemed my own for many years after I had reached man's estate; to see the rooms bereft of every familiar feature, and made so unfamiliar in spite of their familiarity.[110]

When Ernest revisited his home after years of separation, he, too, did so reluctantly, but his hesitation arose from a different source.

> The journey was a painful one. As he drew near to the station and caught sight of each familiar feature, so strong was the force of association that he felt as though his coming into his aunt's money had been a dream, and he were again returning to his father's house as he had returned to it from Cambridge for the vacations. Do what he would, the old dull weight of home-sickness began to oppress him, his heart beat fast as he thought of his approaching meeting with his father and mother. "And I shall have", he said to himself, "to kiss Charlotte."[111]

Butler admitted much in these contrasts. When imprisoned Ernest's deepest despair came when "he thought of the pain his disgrace would inflict on his father and mother."[112] The scene of Ernest's release from prison was truly pathetic. The sight of his parents, after he had made his decision to sever all relations with them, made it desperately hard for Ernest.

> Ernest was as white as a sheet. His heart beat so that he could hardly breathe. He let his mother embrace him and then withdrawing himself stood silently before her with the tears falling from his eyes.[113]

Years later, when his mother sent for him on her death bed "he was touched at her desire to see him."[114] Ernest had endured much at the hands of his

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[110] Ibid., p. 183.

[111] Ibid., p. 439.

[112] Ibid., p. 332.

[113] Ibid., p. 362.

[114] Ibid., p. 439.

parents but there always remained a spark of filial regard. Butler has been very careful to preserve this; it is an hereditary trait he incorporates in his theory of transmission.

The exemplification of the theory is further seen in the fatherhood of Ernest. There was nothing in Ernest's unhappy childhood that would foster a paternal instinct in him, but neither, apparently, was there any force that was capable of destroying it. Ernest did not accept the dissolution of his marriage or what he thought was his marriage, as a dispensation from any moral obligation to his children.

> He wanted his children to be brought up in the fresh pur air,
>
> and particularly,
>
> among other children who were happy and contented,
>
> and where,
>
> they will not be betrayed into the misery of false expectations.[115]

He did side-step to some extent his parental duty by putting his children in the hands of a fine young couple with children of their own. His reasoning in the case was that he feared that he would treat his children as he had been treated by his father, and

> his father had been treated by Ernest's grandfather. So alarming an hereditary taint could not be ignored.[116]

He always kept in touch with them, however, and on one occasion after his return from a long absence abroad, one of the first things he did was to go to see his children. Overton on this visit said

> I felt as I looked at them that if I had had children of my own I could have wishes no better home for them, nor better companions.[117]

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[115] Ibid., p. 420.

[116] Ibid., p. 419.

[117] Ibid., p. 466.

Butler apparently did believe that a happy childhood was possible and was desirable. One wonders at the import of this paragraph of Butler's

> The child (Ernest) was puny, white and sickly, so they sent continually for the doctor who dosed him with calomel and James's powder. All was done in love, anxiety, timidity, stupidity, and impatience. They were stupid in little things; and he that is stupid in little will be stupid also in much.[118]

Although the sincerity of Butler's purpose is not to be doubted, it is perhaps safe to conjecture that he was somewhat braggadocio in a great many things he had to say. He has left unmolested enough of the real sentiment of home and family life, to justify the conviction that he himself was not exactly in complete accord with what The Way of All Flesh undoubtedly aims to express. Nevertheless he displays a fearless courage in the moral criticisms he made. He wrote with a quiet, unornamented prose, designed to further the narrative without attracting attention to its style. He is helped considerably in the easy unfolding of the story, by the use of a narrator, whose chronology places him in a position, where he is able to look both backward and forward in relation to the hero. Overton was a boyhood friend of Theobald's and knew Ernest's grandfather. He therefore was in possession of facts about Ernest that were necessary to know, in order to understand the forces working within him, that inevitably led to his break with his parents. Butler shows great skill in the use of the narrator and his characters. Overton never obtrudes himself; Ernest is always the center of interest. Theobald and Christina are vitally present, and Joey and Charlotte are equally real in their minor parts. Butler has also shown great

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[118] Ibid., p. 110.

discretion in the use of irony, and a genius in its manipulation. The Way of All Flesh is a book whose whole being and whose every part is so saturated with irony that the ironic accent needs never to be pointed out, or underlined, or made explicit. It is because Butler has made the symbols of his thought so dangerously human that the book is so terrible. Since the publication of The Way of All Flesh, the family novel has assumed a new form based upon the example of its geneological feature. It is a relief to know that the domestic story of the following century that sprung up under the influence of Butler's study, did not assume a similar trend to The Way of All Flesh.

CONCLUSION

Since the first appearance of the family theme in English fiction, it has had a definite moral tone. During the seventeenth century the demand of the growing reading public was for a moral type of literature covering domestic scenes. The desire persisted in the eighteenth century in spite of its brutally realistic tales of the earlier period. In the nineteenth century we find the moral tone established as the most definite aspect of the novel devoted to domestic life. Common to the nineteenth century, as to any period of history, where great changes take place, was the conservative element that adhered to the customary and refused to make adjustments. On the other hand there is the radical element that scrupled at no innovation. As we have seen, these tendencies gave rise in domestic life to a diverse range of family ideals and practices. The fiction writers of the century who were interested in the domestic theme wrote on what was pertinent to the family of their selection. Hence, Jane Austen selected the middle-class family and attempted by means of a satiric attack, to free its members from the mannerisms of a social code that was hampering it. The family that was dominated by the stern Puritanical code of an earlier century, fell under Samuel Butler's particular opprobrium. Thackeray skeptically drew the family of doubtful moral integrity; while Bulwer-Lytton selected for his enthusiastic treatment the family actuated by a high idealism of conduct.

There is an overlapping of themes in all the novels in this study; but common to each is an interest in some moral phase of family life. For instance, Jane Austen is interested in marriage as a social asset in Sense and Sensibility and in Pride and Prejudice, in contrast to Mrs. Gaskell's Ruth, where marriage is interpreted in terms of a spiritual institution; or, to Wilkie Collins' The Woman in White which has to do with marriage as affecting the legal rights of women, or again to Meredith's The Amazing Marriage which brings forward the question of the social freedom of woman. The moral aspects of education is another theme of interest. It is developed as to its effects upon character and conduct by Bulwer-Lytton in The Caxtons, and George Meredith in The Ordeal of Richard Feveral. In George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss, we find great attention being given to the aspect of childhood in its relation to home and brothers and sisters. The artificiality of family ambition in fashionable life occupies a prominent place in Maria Edgeworth's The Absentee, and Thackeray's Vanity Fair. Thackeray's The Newcomes is centered on the idea of love and sacrifice within the family; while religious practices is the keynote of Samuel Butler's The Way of All Flesh.

The nineteenth century drive for a higher code of morals was forced and ended in an artificiality of conduct within the family institution that the novelists sought to destroy. The earlier writers were more hampered by conventions than those who came later. Those of the early century were compelled to write with greater conservatism, as we have seen in Fanny Burney and Jane Austen; some went so far as to idealize the family as did Bulwer-Lytton; others, writing later, circumvented their intention, as did

Wilkie Collins. Thackeray, for a Victorian, was quite outspoken, and Meredith was just short of being reactionary. Samuel Butler was modern in his fearlessness.

The effect of Butler's novel is traceable in much of the fiction which follows it. It is seen in the loosening of the Victorian conventions of technical form, and in the extension of the novel to include all sorts of personal reflections. But whereas The Way of All Flesh was a frank and daring criticism of family life, written in the cause of a greater personal development through the freeing of the individual from social prejudices, the later novels, with a similar purpose, present a dissection of domestic relations that borders on the destructive. Bernard Shaw writes of the moral authority of parents as an antiquated form, and of marriage as an institution devoid of any quality other than that of a transitory value. D. H. Lawrence insisted that the relation between parents and children should not be based on too great a tenderness, or on a too close understanding as such affection debilitates the individual. May Sinclair interprets the interests of parents in their children as that of personal egoism, and claims that religious sanctions and ideals of renunciation destroy the individual. Many of these later novelists took for their themes, situations arising in the field of morbid psychology in an attempt to approach the normal through a study of the abnormal. Miss Sinclair's Mary Olivier deals with the problem of a mother's love for her oldest son to the exclusion of her other children, and of its effect on the life of a daughter. D. H. Lawrence used a similar theme and method in Sons and Lovers. The extremity of viewpoint is probably changing, if Miss V. Sackville-West's All Passions Spent (1931) is any in-

dication. Here the heroine of the story is a woman of eighty, whose life story is told in terms of graceful self-abnegation and final emancipation. It would appear that the day of the destructive dissection of family life in English fiction inaugurated by Samuel Butler's attack is over, and that the analysis of domestic problems has assumed a more balanced treatment.

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James J. Young,A.M.	June 6, 1936